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Plus New R1300RS sports tourer tested. Has BMW gone too far?

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Bike

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'I spend £250,000 a year on racing'

MotoGP's **Jack Miller** talks through his bank statements

'I spent £435 on a Triumph tourer'

Then headed off to Barcelona

BMW
R1300GS
Adventure
Ducati
Streetfighter
V2
Yamaha
R9
Triumph
Street
Triple RS
Voge
DS900X
Honda
GB350S
Triumph
Tiger Sport
800
Honda
CB1000
Hornet SP
Kawasaki
Ninja
1100SX

[Bestest of the best]

BIKE OF THE YEAR 2025

15 big-value gems. But which shines brightest?

Beware the cliffs

Remarkable new Ducati XDiavel carves up the Alps

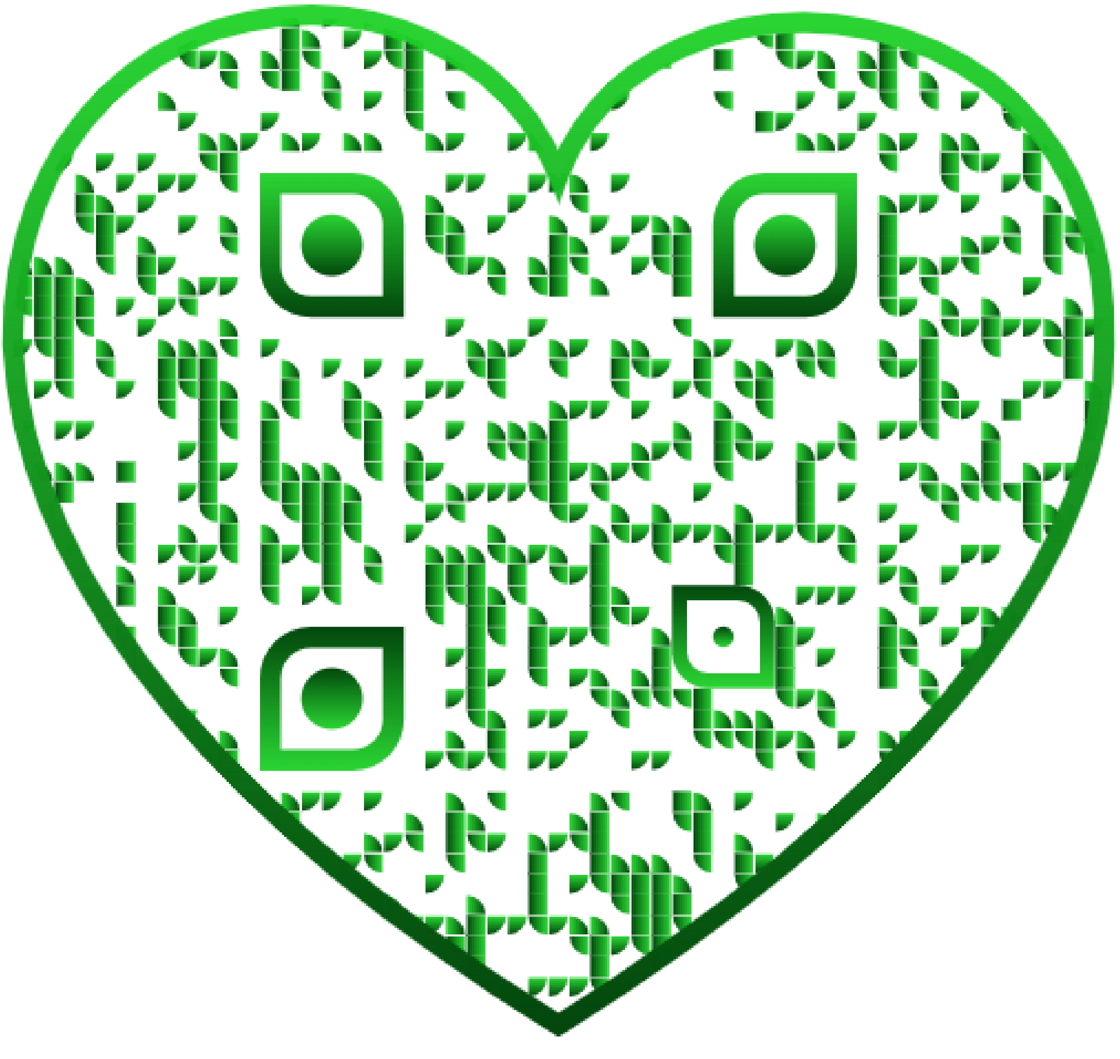
20 pages of KNOW HOW

Suzuki V-Strom 800RE verdict
BMW race school tested
Top-value summer kit
BSA Rocket 3

Slicks on gravel?!

Welcome to the wondrous world of Supermoto lunacy

PLUS: Sports-touring tyre wisdom... ...Trail riding half-asleep... Yam R125



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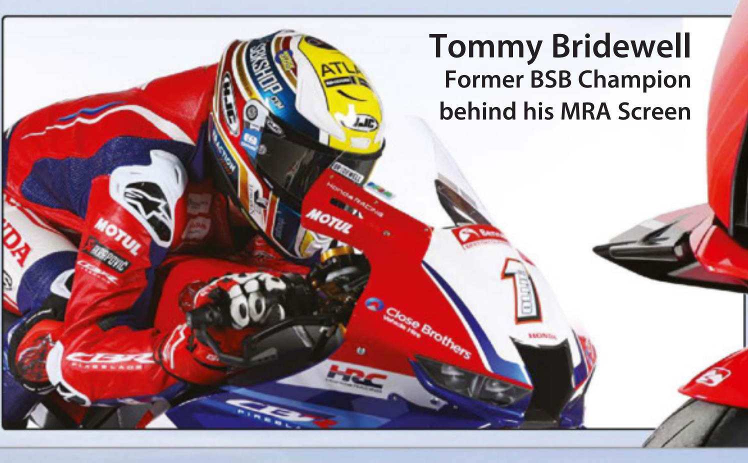

Tommy Bridewell
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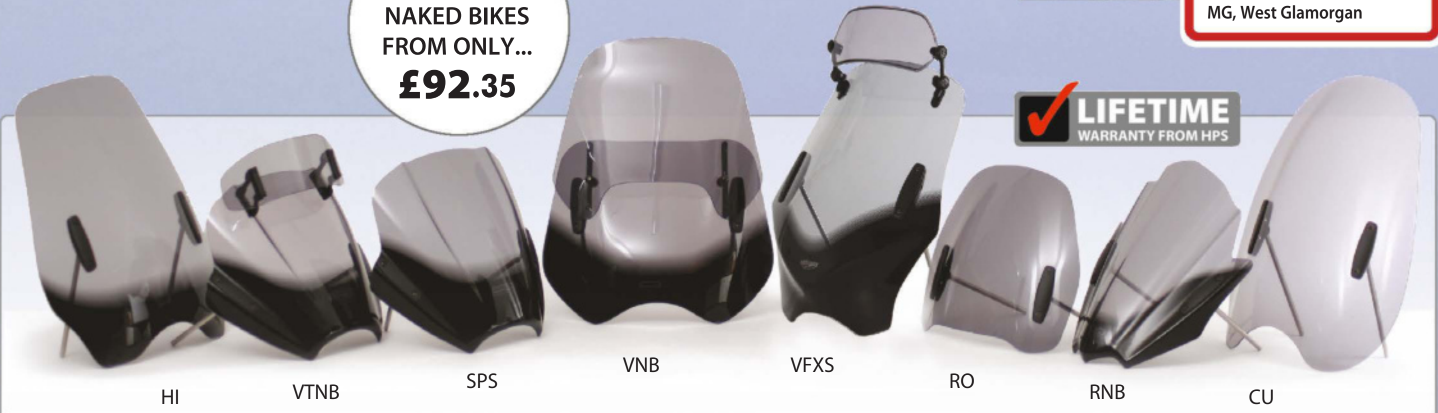

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‘This trio stand proudly atop our ranking – but which is our winner?’

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Brilliant Land's End Trial. Seemed stupid at the time

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XDiavel puts best foot forward on Route Napoléon

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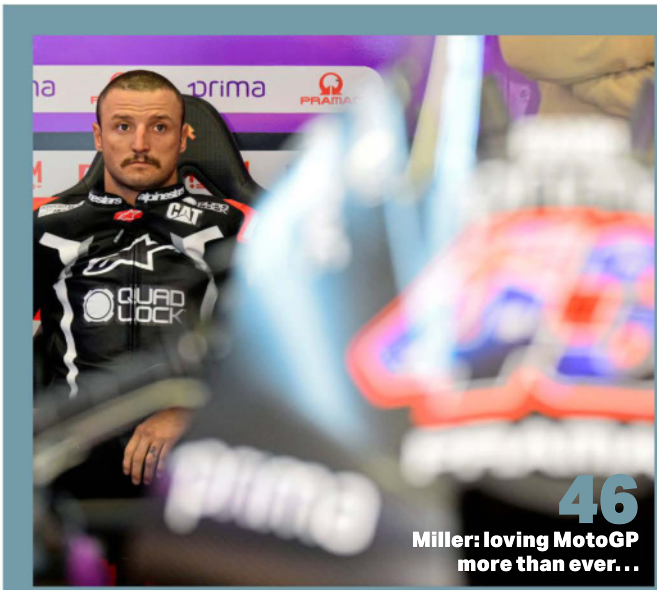

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Hello

Bike
Issue 630 September 2025
Contact us: bike@bikemagazine.co.uk or 01733 468000
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Yet another roadside argument…

Defining 'best' can be bothersome. One person's idea of the finest music will be different to another's. You might say that a sliver of something artisan, hand-pressed, pan-seared and sprinkled with unicorn tears is superior dining, but I'd argue seaside fish and chips are better (and of course I'd be right).

We've crowned a Bike of the Year pretty much every year since *Bike* was founded way back in 1971. At times it's been quite serious – at one point we used complex equations to pick the best bike, based on values for performance, handling, comfort, innovation and the like. But we had a light-bulb moment a few years ago. We had assembled a collection of that year's new tackle for a front cover photoshoot, and were discussing the various merits of the bike that had come out on top after the strict judging process. There was lots of chin-rubbing and nodding… and then John Westlake pointed at the then-new Ducati DesertX that was in attendance and declared he'd rather ride that. We all agreed. Bikes are for riding, and the deciding factor for Bike of the Year is surely the bike we want to ride most.

This year, your panel of fussy road testers, experts and opinionated sorts all voted for their favourite new bikes based on comparable factors, features and spec, but with the all-important 'how gooey does it make your tummy' front of mind. Having counted the votes, we then toddled off on the frontrunners around Derbyshire to squabble over the winner. I took this snap of Martin Fitz-Gibbons telling Paul Lang where he can take his ridiculous opinions. Bike of the Year 2025 starts on page 32 – it's probably the closest result in my 20 years on *Bike*.

Which is fitting really, given this is my last issue as editor – I'm shuffling away to work on *Classic Bike*. During my time on *Bike*, I've been fortunate enough to work with some amazing people and experience some remarkable things, and it's been a privilege to make your magazine. Thank you for your continued support.

Enjoy the issue, and please be nice to the new editor…

Mike Armitage
Editor

PIC: MIKE ARMITAGE

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Team Bike

This magazine is made by the most talented team of bike journalists, writers and photographers in the universe. Here's what they've been doing this month.

Petrol and the greatest engine ever
Tech

1

Jamie Turner

Want the opposite of dumbing down? Read what our professor of engines has to say about the future of fuel and why a weird ditch pump contraption is the world's most important motor.

Tech, page 22

Podium in the Peaks

2

Martin Fitz-Gibbons

All *Bike*'s road testers think about the bikes they're riding. None of them think as hard as MFG, or express those thoughts with such poetic clarity. There was only one man to decide our Bike of the Year.

Bike of the Year finale, page 38

'You learn how to navigate the cesspool'
Oxley interview

3

Mat Oxley

MotoGP racers have a PR filter installed that can make interviews humdrum. Mat's power is to get them to switch it off. (Though, to be fair, Jack Miller didn't have a fully functional filter in the first place…)

Jack Miller interview, page 46

No sleep till Redruth

4

John Westlake

A quiet weekend in with a nice ride on Sunday is fine by us. But occasionally it's good to do something ludicrous. Like ride through the night off-road on a 40-year-old shitter with 300 like-minded cretins…

Land's End Trial, page 54

A case of mistaken identity

5

Chris Cope

The Ducati XDiavel has the whiff of an engineer's wager – 'I bet you can't make a cruiser with a lorry tyre on the back handle properly'. Game on. Our man tests the new Ducati on the Route Napoléon.

XDiavel in the Alps, page 62

Karaoke, prog rock and cheap bikes

6

Alistair George

In an attempt to prove that you don't need a £20,000 R1300GS to go European touring, Alistair sets forth unto the continent on a £435 Triumph Trophy. Inevitably, it didn't quite go as planned…

Skinflint Rally, page 80

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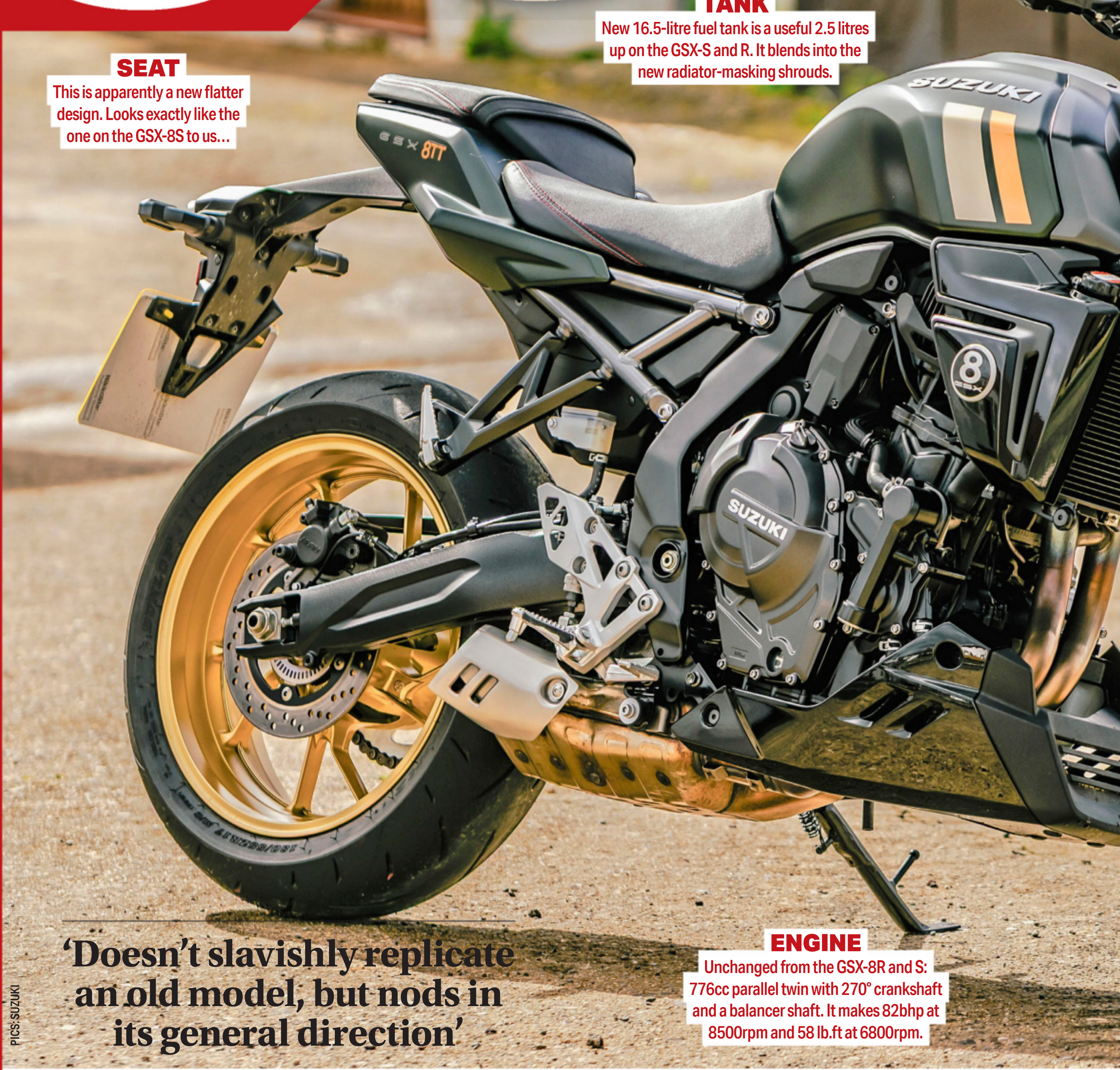
Engine and chassis are identical to the GSX-8S – so it'll be good at corners

In the late 1970s, the GS1000S bestrode the world like an ill-handling T-Rex



TANK

New 16.5-litre fuel tank is a useful 2.5 litres up on the GSX-S and R. It blends into the new radiator-masking shrouds.

SEAT

This is apparently a new flatter design. Looks exactly like the one on the GSX-8S to us…

> 'Doesn't slavishly replicate an old model, but nods in its general direction'

ENGINE

Unchanged from the GSX-8R and S: 776cc parallel twin with 270° crankshaft and a balancer shaft. It makes 82bhp at 8500rpm and 58 lb.ft at 6800rpm.

PICS: SUZUKI

GSX-8 goes retro

New **Suzuki GSX-8TT** harks back to the mighty GS1000S to create a classy sub-£10,000 retro

FAIRING
Squint and there's a bit of GS1000S about it. The round LED headlight with a horizontal strip across it is new too.

Kawasaki Z900RS, Yamaha XSR900GP, BMW R12 nineT, Honda GB350S, Triumph Bonneville… the demand for retros seems insatiable. So it's no surprise that Suzuki have hopped on the flare-bedecked bandwagon with this, the new GSX-8TT.

Like Yamaha's XSR900 and BMW's original R nineT, the new Suzuki doesn't slavishly replicate an old model, but just nods in its general direction. In this case, there are hints of the 1970s GS1000S in the nose fairing, while the new seat, fuel tank, bars, belly pan, bar-end mirrors and – of course – the round headlight have been designed to give a '70s/'80s vibe. Suzuki say the bike was styled in Italy then refined back in Japan.

Underneath the retro clobber is the same GSX-8 engine from the naked S and sportier R models. That's a very good thing; the 776cc parallel twin is a peach, combining masses of low-end drive with a top end that feels friskier than its 82bhp peak power figure suggests. It's a brilliant middleweight motor.

The GSX-8TT shares its twin-spar steel frame and KYB suspension with the GSX-8S, which is also fine by us – the 8S's ride quality and handling are good, which is a relief as there's no rebound or compression damping adjustment so you're stuck with stock settings.

All the GSX-8 electronics are carried over too, which means there aren't the retro clocks you get on a Z900RS or Bonneville. Instead, the dash is the GSX-8's TFT screen that lets you fiddle with three traction control settings and three power modes. There's no phone connectivity though, so you can't load up satnav or tunes. A bi-directional quickshifter comes as standard.

The bike should be in dealers now, priced at £9999 – £1500 cheaper than Kawasaki's more powerful Z900RS and only £500 more than Triumph's 54bhp Bonneville T100. The standard GSX-8S is £8229.

There's a GSX-8T, too

» If the '70s nose fairing doesn't do it for you, Suzuki have also launched a naked version called the 8T. It's identical but lacks the fairing, belly pan and stripes, and has a slightly lower saddle. Different paint jobs too – the orangey gold you see here, or green or black. It's £400 cheaper than the TT at £9599 and is available now.

GSX-8T comes without the fairing. Gold forks, though

[UP FOR SALE]

Pre-war Panigale

The bike's RAF heritage is still being researched. It's thought this is at RAF Langham in Norfolk

In fact that's understating it. In 1937 this **Vincent Rapide** V-twin was mind-frazzlingly fast. And you can buy it…

With a 998cc capacity, 195kg weight and a wheelbase of 1473mm, the specs of this Series 'A' Vincent-HRD Rapide V-twin are strikingly similar to modern superbikes. Okay, so the Rapide's 110mph top speed is down a bit, but it was a revelation back in 1937 – it was the fastest production vehicle ever made and capable of twice the speed most traffic could manage. Think Ducati V4 R and then some.

And this Rapide, up for auction in Bonhams' autumn sale, is a cracker. It's the 13th of 78 Series A Rapides ever built, and one of only a handful known to retain its original frame, engine, gearbox and registration number.

The reason it looks so immaculate is down to Colin Jenner, a lifelong Vincent obsessive who ran a specialist Vincent workshop for 20 years. He bought the Rapide incomplete, in unrestored condition, and has meticulously returned it to factory-fresh.

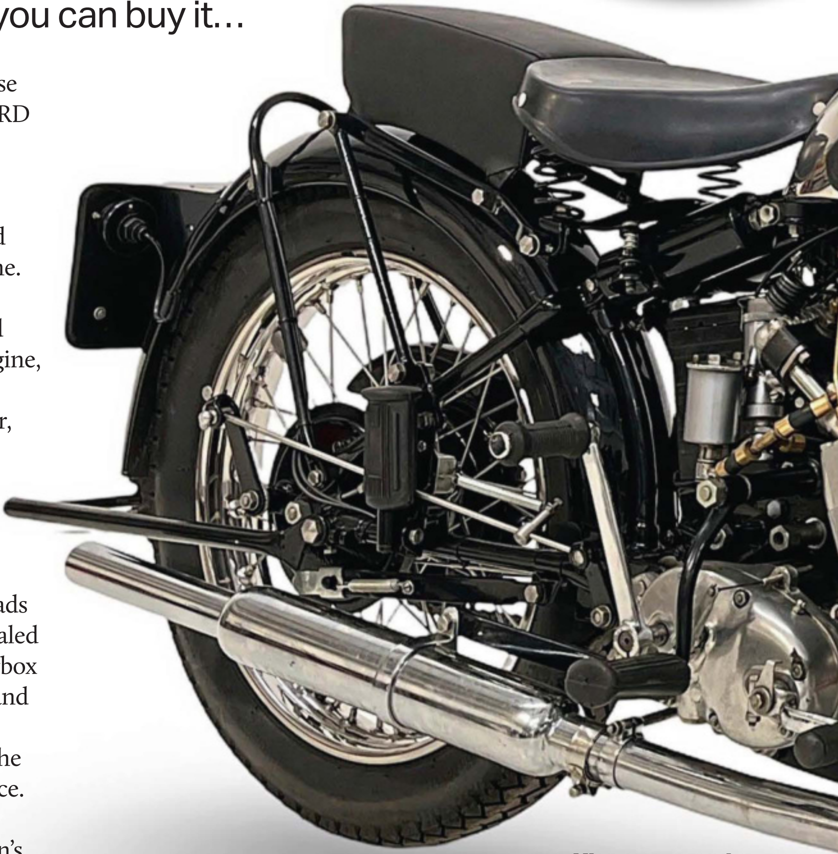
The engine required serious work. Colin fitted new alloy barrels, standard 7.3:1 compression pistons, new cylinder heads and valve train components, and added some modern oil-sealed valve guides for improved reliability. He overhauled the gearbox and oil pump, installed a correct-spec Lucas 8in headlamp, and got the combined fuel/oil tank professionally refurbished – though he left a small, lead-filled repair in the left side of the tank as this was probably sustained during wartime air service. There are photographs showing it in use at an RAF base.

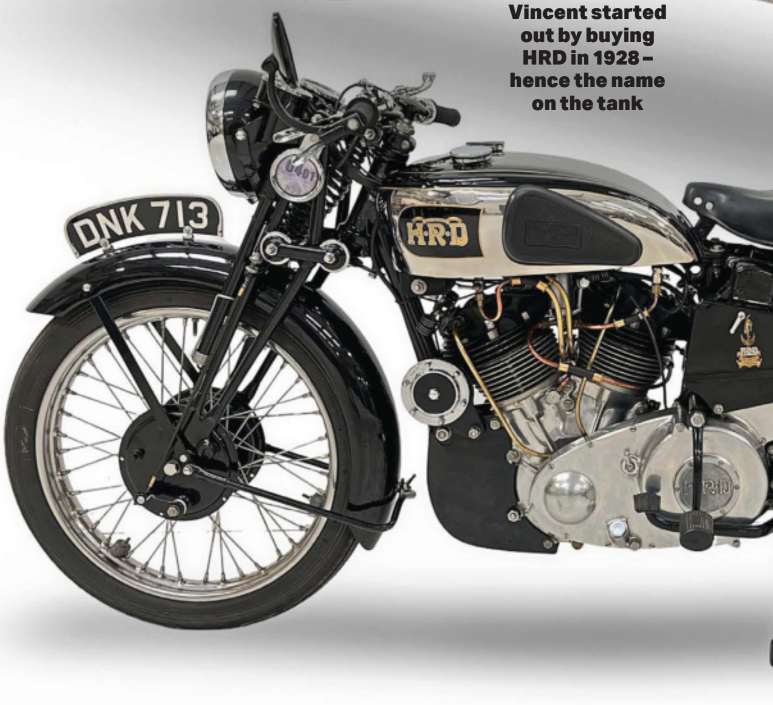
Some parts were problematic even for someone with Colin's contacts. Original pre-war carbs aren't available so he fitted Amals, and although the Smiths speedometer has been professionally rebuilt, the clock now operates using a discreet modern battery.

Once finished, the Rapide was run-in for 250 miles and Colin says it's ready for action. He's even offered to act as a Vincent helpline for the new owner. The only remaining problem is the price… Bonhams' estimate is £180,000 to £240,000, but we suspect it will go for a lot more than that. It's being auctioned on October 12 at the Stafford Show.

» More info at bonhams.com

'It was the fastest production vehicle ever made and capable of twice the speed most traffic could manage'





Vincent started out by buying HRD in 1928 – hence the name on the tank

PICS: BONHAMS

NEW BITS

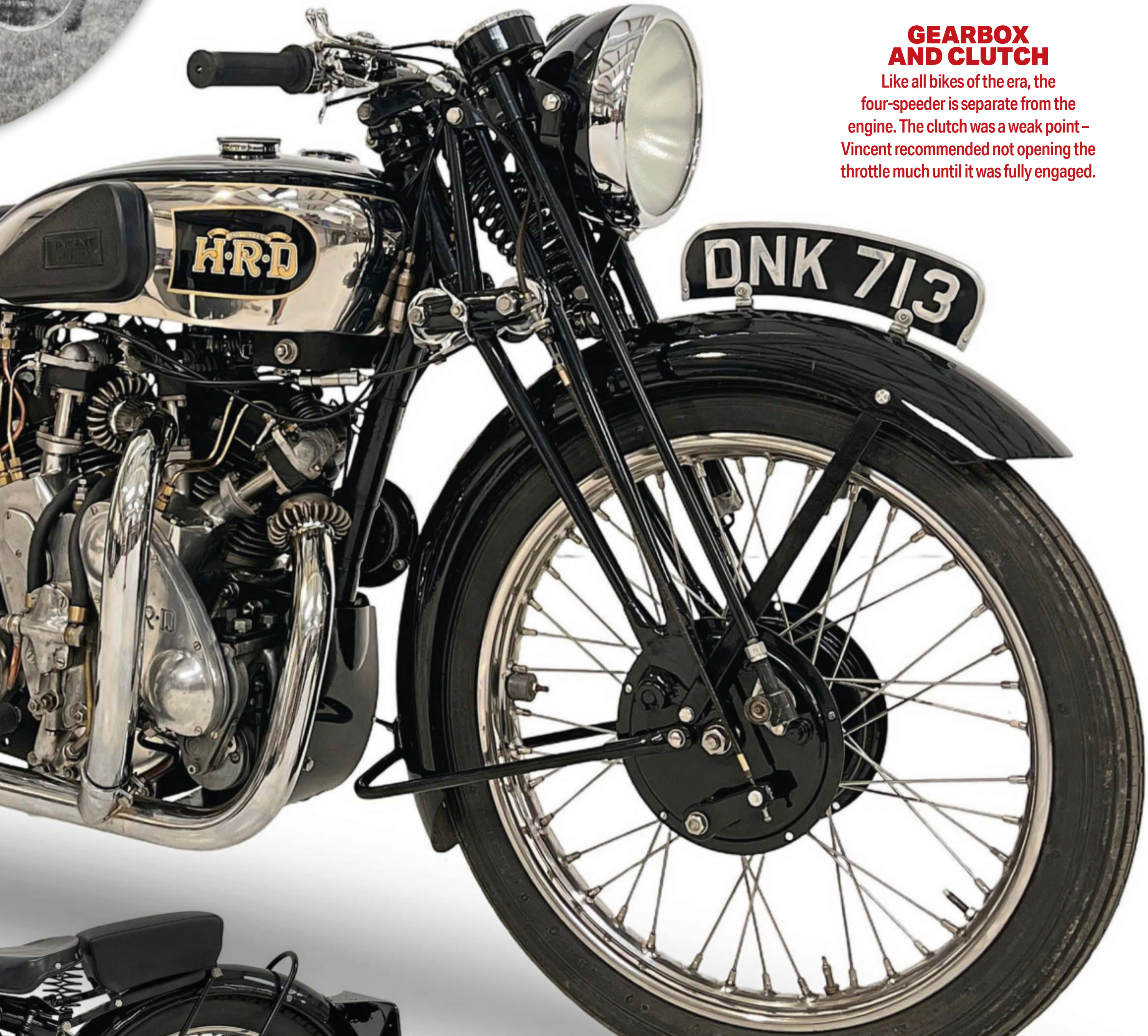
Several components were beyond saving – mudguards, seat, chains, sprockets, brakes, and wheel bearings are all new.

ENGINE

An air-cooled 998cc pushrod V-twin with two overhead valves per cylinder that made 45bhp at 5500rpm. By modern standards it's a low-revving plodder, but still feels quick – the low-end torque is seriously impressive.

GEARBOX AND CLUTCH

Like all bikes of the era, the four-speeder is separate from the engine. The clutch was a weak point – Vincent recommended not opening the throttle much until it was fully engaged.



CHASSIS

A steel tube perimeter frame with cantilevered rear suspension and friction-damped girder forks (which have been completely rebuilt).

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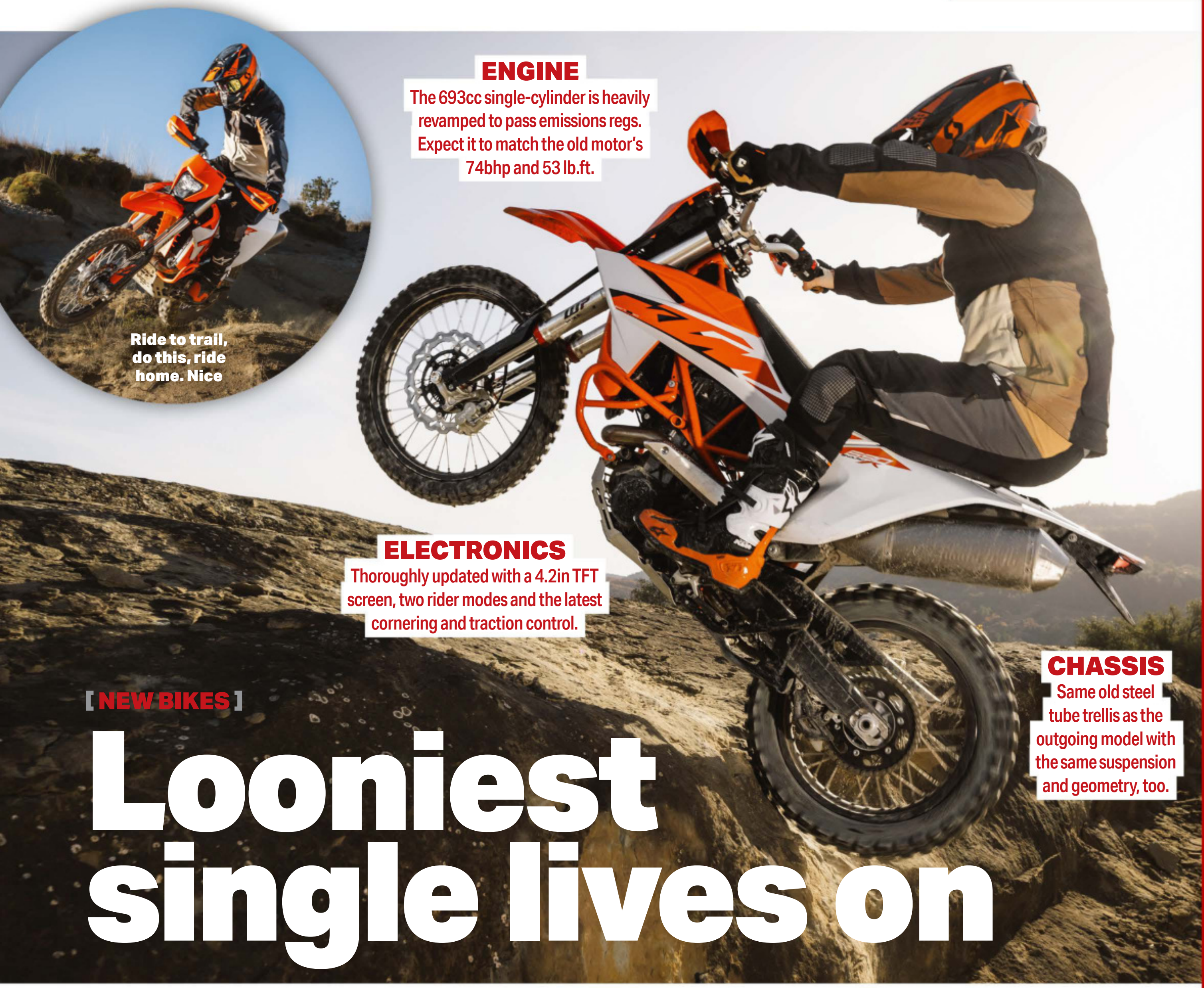

Ride to trail, do this, ride home. Nice

ENGINE
The 693cc single-cylinder is heavily revamped to pass emissions regs. Expect it to match the old motor's 74bhp and 53 lb.ft.

ELECTRONICS
Thoroughly updated with a 4.2in TFT screen, two rider modes and the latest cornering and traction control.

CHASSIS
Same old steel tube trellis as the outgoing model with the same suspension and geometry, too.

[NEW BIKES]

Looniest single lives on

New **KTM 690 Enduro R** gets an updated engine and new electronic gizmos

Desperate to announce some good news after months of financial horror, KTM have revealed a new 690 Enduro R earlier than planned – it was due for a late summer launch, but the Austrians decided to unveil it early so they could parade it at more shows (such at the ABR Festival).

KTM say half the engine components are new but haven't revealed the new power or torque figures, leading us to suspect the changes are to improve emission performance rather than anything you'd notice on the road or trail. That's no great loss – the old engine's 74bhp was ample for blindingly fast B-road japes and far too much on trails for anyone not called Billy Bolt. And the twin balancer shafts rendered it eerily smooth for a configuration that essentially tries to vibrate itself to death.

From a rider's point of view, the most important changes are most likely to be electronic. For a start, the olde worlde LCD display has been replaced by a 4.2in TFT, and the equally antiquated switchgear is ditched in favour of KTM's latest backlit switchcubes. KTM have obviously been listening to owners because there's an ABS off button built into the left cube so you don't have to prod at the dash as per the old bike.

All the electronics have been updated – the last model went five years without a tickle, after all – with KTM's latest cornering ABS and traction control, plus two riding modes. The old bike's ABS and traction control were startlingly good on dirt, so we can't wait to try out the new set-up. Weirdly, the two modes are Street and Sport – the Rally mode needed for off-road is an extra.

KTM say the ergonomics are better, but don't say how. One KTM staffer who sat on it at ABR says it feels slimmer between your knees when you're at the front of the saddle in attack mode.

Price is unknown, but the 2025 model is £10,399 and the new one is bound to be a chunk more than that.

PICS: KTM

Littluns selling well

» The 690 Enduro R's smaller brother, the 390, is already heading for sales glory with dealers reportedly taking almost as many deposits as for the 390 Adventure. 'The 390 Enduro R is selling really well,' said KTM's Dom Harris. 'I suspect it's because the new Suzuki DR-Z4S is £7999, which makes the 390 Enduro R look seriously tempting at £5699."

390 Enduro R: the same but littler

[ELECTRIC SPORT]

Milestone alert!

Honda's Montesa RTL electric trials bike isn't just beating a few petrol-powered rivals – it's leading the world championship

As *Bike* goes to press, this Honda Montesa electric trials bike is leading the Trial2 world championship (equivalent to Moto2, and previously dominated by petrol-powered bikes). Were it to win, it would be the first electric motorcycle to take an ICE world championship.

But even if it gets pipped by a petrol bike, it's proof of how serious HRC are about electric off-road sport – the bike's motor and battery are developments of prototypes we first saw last year when Honda entered a wildcard electric bike in the All Japan Motocross Championship. And Honda openly admit they're using Trial2 as a testing ground for the premier class of TrialGP, aiming to build a bike that's superior to 37-time world champion Toni Bou's Cota 4RT.

Though it suits Honda to say the Trial2 efforts are evidence of a commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2040, they're also in it because they know they can win. With far lower speeds and less run time, off road sport – even motocross – is suited to electric power in a way MotoGP definitely isn't.

For example, the Trial2 bike is rumoured to match petrol rivals' peak power output, weigh no more, and have far superior torque. Also, Honda have redesigned the frame and swingarm to ensure its weight distribution is just as good. Add a whacking great flywheel to take the edge off the motor's tendency to spin up, a clutch to make it feel familiar to trials riders, and gears (Honda won't say how many), and you have a competitive machine.

Honda are coy about how long the battery lasts, but that's not a problem in trials because according to the current rules they can swap it between sections.

> 'Honda admit Trial2 is testing ground for TrialGP'

MOTOR
All Honda will say is that it's an AC synchronous motor that's integrated with the inverter and 'suited to high output and motor speed'. Unlike electric scoots, there's a traditional hydraulic clutch and gearbox, too.

Frame, suspension and brakes largely the same as Bou's TrialGP bike

If Spanish hotshot Miquel Gelabert keeps doing this, the leccy Honda will win a world title

BATTERY
This was developed for Honda's prototype electric motocross bike. The capacity is unknown.

CHASSIS
Same tubular aluminium frame and swingarm as Toni Bou's all-conquering Honda Montesa Cota 4RT, but with modifications to accept the battery and motor. Apparently the overall frame weight is less.

PHOTOS: HONDA MONTESA

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THE BIG PROBLEM
Ducati don't make the 955cc V2 anymore so teams are scrambling for bikes and spares. 'We're lucky,' says Leigh, 'because we bought two brand-new bikes last season, knowing this was going to happen.'

ENGINE
The old 955cc V-twin Superquadro motor with Desmodromic valves, high-flow injectors and huge intakes. Too powerful for World Supersport rules, so heavily restricted. Ducati will release a racing kit for the new non-Desmo V2 in 2027, but until then, this is the engine to have.

[RACING]

'It's cheap to run!'

You'd think **Michael Dunlop's Ducati V2** TT weapon would be a highly strung money pit. Quite the reverse…

'There's no point doing anything to the motor,' says Michael Dunlop's crew chief Leigh Finlay, finally catching breath after Dunlop's two TT Supersport wins and a summer of Irish road racing on this Ducati Panigale V2 (the old 955cc Desmo model, not the new 890cc one).

'Supersport rules mean it's restricted to 79 per cent throttle, so there's no point tuning it. Also, not many people know this but it makes the Ducati really cheap to run.'

Eh? How can a flighty Italian Supersport bike be cheaper to run than Japanese 600s?

'Because we're running a standard engine that's never revved,' says Leigh. 'Last year with Davey Todd we did the North West, TT, Armoy and a few tests, and we never had to strip the engine. That V2 is running around now in national road races and it still hasn't been stripped – there's no need. Also, we only put a new clutch in once a year because it's so easy on them.

'Compare that to an R6 where you have to keep refreshing the engine – and that's £7500 a go. The cost of these Ducatis is all in the buying – not the running.'

Leigh won't say how much Dunlop's bike cost, but given that it was one of Ducati's factory World Supersport bikes from 2024, it can't have been cheap. 'It was a lot of money, but we bought it as a way of learning what the factory team are doing. You're buying their knowledge – they've got years of experience putting together all the little bits and pieces that make up a well-thought out race bike.

PICS: PACEMAKER

Supersport race two... same result: a win for Dunlop and the V2

The team celebrate Michael Dunlop's first Supersport TT win earlier this year. Leigh is on the left

LOOM

Custom-made so the team can move components about – the battery, for example, is up front because the TT-spec petrol tank now runs under the seat.

SUSPENSION

The forks get Öhlins FGR kits (the stanchions are standard) and there's an Öhlins rear shock. Dunlop uses the standard shock linkage for the roads because it's more progressive.

'For example, their factory radiator is completely different to the one we ran – we didn't know a better one existed. Another example: they use an 8mm quickshifter and last year we ran a 6mm one, but they'd found that because the gearbox is quite tight, the 6mm can bend. Little things like that are priceless.'

> 'It was a lot of money, but we bought it as a way of learning what the factory team are doing – you're buying their knowledge'

Any surprises? 'People may be surprised how easy they are to work on. You take a side panel off and all the electronics are there bolted onto plates – everything is visible and you don't have to take the tank off to get at a sensor. I really like them.

'The only difficult thing is changing the engine. You have to remove the front frame – ie, the whole front end [the engine is a stressed member – Ed]. Then take off the rear subframe, exhaust and footrests, which allows you to remove the swingarm. Then take off the throttle bodies and airbox. If you're in a rush you can do it in 90 minutes, but we changed one at the TT and it took us most of the day as we were inspecting and cleaning as we went.'

Probably best not to try this at home

PIC: CHIPPY WOOD

DUCATI JUMPING
Bike
BRITAIN'S BEST SELLING MOTO
THE TEST
UFO
DUCATI MULTISTRADA
VERSUS BMW R1200GS &
YAMAHA SUPER TENERE
The ultimate adventure bike

Not AI and not Photoshop. Eek

From the archive

***Bike*: The voice of motorcycling since 1971**

2010 Ducati Multistrada 1200 S

Fifteen summers ago Ducati claimed their new adventure bike had all-terrain ambition. **Martin Fitz-Gibbons** recalls *Bike* testing that theory with a Dakar veteran and a motocross track

It's a scorching June day at Washbrook Farm motocross track. This is the culmination of a week-long group test pitching Ducati's new Multistrada 1200 S against BMW's R1200GS and Yamaha's long-awaited Super Ténéré 1200. We're sweating buckets in our two-piece leathers – even affable antipodean, Dakar Rally veteran and long-time *Bike* collaborator Simon Pavey, who we've convinced to don some second-hand Spidis.

We have this track to ourselves, reasoning that it would let two dirt novices (Mike Armitage and me) wobble round without anyone laughing while Pavey could do some spectacular skids for the cover. We had no idea how spectacular things would get…

It was a transitional year for Ducati, British motorcycling, and *Bike*. Sportsbike sales were plummeting, yet the GS's popularity soared. Ducati responded with the Multistrada – for the first time their most advanced, innovative model wasn't a superbike. They spoke seriously about its dirt credentials, too. 'Tackles off-road routes with the agility of an enduro,' the press release boasted. 'The biggest testing job in years… thousands of kilometres off-road,' said Ducati's head tester Andrea Gesi.

But *Bike* being *Bike*, we wanted to find out for ourselves. Only problem was that Mike and I didn't know one end of a knobbly from the other – hence choosing leathers to manhandle 250kg adventure bikes at a motocross track in summer.

Having managed to totter round half a lap, we reach the track's tabletop jump – a daunting dirt ramp so steep it's like staring up at a mucky Everest. Simon gleefully launches 1200cc of Bologna brilliance more than 6ft into the air before landing on the down ramp. Jaws hang out the bottom of our peaky lids. That's the cover shot. Pavey repeats his derring-do with indifference. Each run he flies higher and further, then dangles a leg for the camera.

He's enjoying it more than the Multi, which suffers a snapped footpeg after one too many hard landings. 'The suspension's too soft,' Simon says. 'It's bottoming out everywhere.' The Multi proved the least capable and confidence-inspiring of our trio for these extreme off-road antics, whoever was at the controls.

While it lost the adventure battle to the GS, the Multistrada won 2010's war. A few months later it was named our Bike of the Year. With multiple modes, electronic suspension and groundbreaking rider aids, the Multistrada 1200 S took road-bike technology to – ahem – new heights. Bike

THIS COULD HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

Petrol hasn't always been made using dead dinosaurs – it used to be biofuel. And it's possible that future fuels – and the internal combustion engine – could actually help reduce CO_2 emissions. Now there's a thought.

Petrol and the greatest engine ever

Professor Jamie Turner reveals how a bunch of fuel researchers invented an engine that changed history

G.R
Kawasaki

Tech

Because motorcycle engineering is beautiful

Jamie Turner
Professor of engines at KAUST, two-stroke lover, BMW K1200S and Ducati Monster owner.

The thing about fuel is that we just take it for granted. It's like it has always been there, at the pumps, available to fill our bikes and let us go about our business with the minimum of fuss. In reality, though, there has been a symbiotic relationship between the auto and fuel industries for a very long time, and the two technology streams have improved in tandem with each other. But which came first, the chicken or the egg, and what do some of the terms used around fuel mean?

The first engines essentially ran on biofuel. The hydrocarbon fuel industry we know today just did not exist back then. Henry Ford's Model T was designed to be able to run on ethanol because US farmers could make it, and Rudolf Diesel's device ran on bio-oil. This was out of necessity because combustible fossil-based fuel was not widely available when those engines were created: ironically, we probably had the most environmentally friendly road transport system we will ever have just after the first motorcycle was created by Gottlieb Daimler; this was slightly before the first 'car' was built by Karl Benz. Since then, of course, we have become conditioned to the 'fact' that IC engines have to run on fossil fuels because this suits their detractors, but it's hogwash – as the origin story above shows. An engine has no inkling of whether the fuel it is consuming is of fossil or any other origin.

Still, one advantage of IC engines is that they are very tolerant of fuel types. This ties to the 'creation' of the first fuel station. In 1888 Bertha Benz took her husband's invention to visit her mum – very much without his permission, since he was worried it would only get bad publicity if it broke down. The journey of just over 65 miles, from Mannheim to Pforzheim, was well above the range of the tank. She therefore had to stop for some kind of fuel, and did this first at an apothecary in Wiesloch, where she purchased 'ligroin'. This was a cleaning fluid that was a near-worthless by-product of the lamp oil industry but which the car's 'Otto engine' ran on. By this date fossil lamp oil had displaced that obtained by slaughtering whales, so at least there was an early benefit to adopting fossil sources. However, the size of the lamp oil market was very small and thus there was little incentive for companies that made it to increase the yield from a barrel of oil, meaning there was lots of cleaning fluid and axle grease available at ultra-low prices.

Planet-wise this wasn't really a problem since only the lamp oil was burnt (creating fossil CO_2), and even then not much was used; besides, Thomas Edison was about to start getting rid of combustion-based lighting with a new-fangled electricity-based alternative. You can imagine how interested those lamp oil companies were in a potentially lucrative market for something

> **'The "fact" IC engines have to run on fossil fuels suits their detractors – it's hogwash'**

that had hitherto been difficult to get rid of. Almost overnight a cheap fuel became available: 'gasoline' (which, I'm afraid to say, is actually its correct name since it was called that before we Brits started to call it 'petrol'), which made running the newly created engine-driven devices very cost-effective.

Knock, knock, knock

Remarkably, from the get-go there was always a worry about when fuel would run out. This was not helped by the fact there were no real standards for fuel for a remarkably long time. The (by now) Big Oil companies wanted to sell crude with the minimum amount of processing and the vehicle manufacturers wanted standards that could be enforced so they could develop better engines, giving them a commercial advantage. It was known that higher compression ratios, or CRs, gave more power and better economy, but very little was understood about the mechanics of 'knock', which was the biggest limit on how far CR could be increased.

Knock is a form of uncontrolled auto-ignition of the 'end gas'; the part of the mixture that has yet to be consumed in a controlled manner by the flame front. Because it is the almost instantaneous ignition of whatever mixture remains, knock generates very high burn rates and, with it, high temperatures and pressures that can destroy pistons, valves, and head gaskets in very short order. Too high a CR for the fuel you are using – or too much spark advance or boost – will trip you into its clutches immediately.

But how to measure a fuel's resistance to knock? In the first half of the 20th century, there was no agreed-upon standard.

In the UK, Harry Ricardo did fantastic work on the challenge, but it was really in the US were the problem of measuring fuel knock resistance got nailed. There was, if not outright war between the auto and oil companies, at least smouldering mistrust. So, the Society of Automotive Engineers helped set up the Cooperative Fuels Research (CFR) committee to tackle the issue, and importantly it had representatives from all interested parties. And what it came up with was fantastic.

Like Ricardo, the committee determined that the best way to approach measuring the knock limit of a fuel was to gradually increase an engine's CR while keeping the rest of its operating parameters fixed. As a result, the CFR engine was designed to their specifications and has a CR that is variable between 4 to 18. The really clever bit – and where, truth be told, they moved beyond Ricardo's work – was that they also developed protocols to arrive at a meaningful measure that wasn't wholly dependent on all the test equipment around the world being identical.

To rate a fuel's knock resistance, the CFR engine is run to one of two test procedures – 'Research' or 'Motor' octane number, which produce the RON and MON numbers, respectively. You may have heard of those. For both, the CR is steadily increased while the engine is running to fixed conditions until a value of 50 is shown on its Knockmeter. Now here's the clever bit. If all the CFR engines were truly identical, we could just quote the CR and be done with it. But they aren't, because of wear, differences in tolerances etc., so the committee came up with a genius step: you now find a mixture of two pre-specified 'primary reference fuels' (PRFs) that gives the same Knockmeter value at the already-determined CR and operating conditions, thus removing the engine-to-engine variation.

> 'Engines could help control net CO_2 emissions – a fantastic and plausible outcome'

What's octane again?

Okay, what chemicals did they choose as the PRFs [Primary Reference Fuels, keep up – Ed]? Well, for the lower rating fuel – the one with no meaningful knock resistance – we use n-heptane. For the upper one we use (deep breath) 2,2,4-trimethylpentane. I won't go into boring details of what these molecules look like, but I will say that the latter is also known as iso-octane. Bingo!

Simply, a fuel's octane number is the volume percentage of iso-octane in a mixture with n-heptane that gives the same knock resistance under the procedure being used as the investigated fuel. Thus, a 95 RON gasoline is equivalent to a 95 per cent iso-octane and five per cent n-heptane volume mixture on the RON test. RON numbers are usually higher than MON numbers for a fuel, because it is a 'harder' test (this is a simplification). All's explained then!

Except, it's not. Some readers may now have their hands up wanting to point out that we have fuels with octane numbers above 100. How can this be? Well, when the CFR committee delivered its engine and procedures in the early 1930s, pump fuels were a long way from 100 on any scale. But then the Second World War happened and fuel development romped away for the Allies, and its combination with massive improvements in supercharging yielded ever-higher performance for existing aircraft designs without having to change their fundamental layout. Just look at the performance improvement of the Spitfire with its Rolls-Royce Merlin engine during the war, enabled by fuels with octane numbers that exceeded 100…

So, to measure ONs above 100, we use iso-octane with small amounts of tetraethyl lead added. Nasty stuff, but this allows us to go up to 120.

As a result of all this enablement of standards, I truly believe the CFR engine is the most important engine ever built. It may not be the greatest and it definitely looks like something Brunel might have knocked up in a shed (there's nowt wrong with that, mind), but in terms of what it has enabled, no other engine has had the same impact. As well as still being used for quality control in refineries the world over, we continue to use it as a tool for fundamental research into fuel/engine interactions – the one I have is presently being used to study hydrogen direct-injection technologies, for instance. It definitely will have affected the engineering of your bike. It has become so important that, despite its core design being nearly 100 years old, we simply cannot change it.

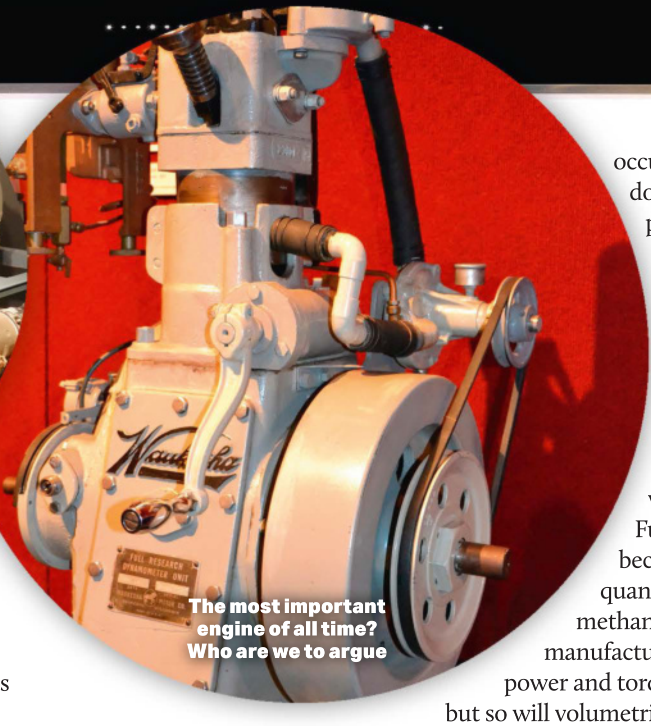
The RON and MON tests were needed because all commercial fuels are really mixtures of hundreds of different molecules because this is what fossil oil comprises. However, octane numbers are not the only thing defined in fuel specs. Distillation curves – which define how the fuel fractions vaporise versus temperature – are very important, for instance. And now we are introducing renewable elements, which for gasoline is primarily in the form of ethanol, which also affects fuel performance. These renewables now make up quite large proportions of fuel ('E10', for instance, is 10 per cent by volume ethanol) and have an effect on the distillation curve because so much of the fuel now has a fixed boiling point. That's not the only challenge – alcohols can affect materials, which is why many old bikes had to have changes to their fuel systems.

ZX-6
Kawasaki
Ninja 636

RONs AND E NUMBERS
The fuel equivalent of nutritional values for your bike. RON, or research octane number, measures knock resistance – the higher the number, the more resistant it is. The E number is the percentage of ethanol in the mix.

ROLLS-ROYCE

Rolls-Royce Merlin V12 did a thing or two for fuel



The most important engine of all time? Who are we to argue

Water in your tank
These are the factors that the vehicle engineers can address, but one fairly major factor they cannot address is what happens if water gets into the system.

In particular, the light alcohols (methanol and ethanol) must have all water removed to be blended with gasoline. This is because water will cause 'phase separation' where an alcohol/water layer separates from the pure hydrocarbons. This then causes starting and running problems – because the ideal air/fuel ratio for the alcohol is very different to that of the hydrocarbons. Essentially, it's likely the engine will stop. Some vehicle motion can help – temporarily – to mix the two phases together in the tank, but when you stop and they separate you'll likely have a devil of a job getting it running again. Light alcohols are highly hygroscopic (they absorb water) so water take-up can occur in fuel station tanks. If it does, the stuff the fuel dispenser picks up can easily be high in the ethanol/water phase, because that is denser than the hydrocarbons. There have been reports of this, and obviously the vehicle manufacturers can do very little about it.

As fuels develop, so engines will as well: it was ever thus. Fully renewable alcohols may become available in ever-greater quantities (we are mainly talking methanol here) and vehicle manufacturers will respond. In that case, power and torque can be expected to increase, but so will volumetric fuel consumption. I am sure most people reading this will take that hit if it means we can have IC engines for longer, provided running costs don't spiral with it. Who knows – we may get back to those halcyon days of the birth of the IC engine when fossil CO_2 emissions were largely absent because bio-derived fuels were being used.

In that case, the IC engine could actually help us control net CO_2 emissions, which would be an utterly fantastic and plausible outcome. After all, learning how to burn things and produce useful work from it is one of mankind's very greatest achievements, driving society to where we are now.

Long live internal combustion! **Bike**

GET IN GEAR

The latest word in swanky riding gear, desirable bolt-ons and must-have goodies for your pride and joy

By **Lyle Armitage**

FROM
£249.99

LS2 Advant II

WHAT IS IT? The newest version of LS2's 180° flip-front helmet, which lets you perform a single-handed one-sweep motion to convert between open and full-face. It has a new lock to ensure the visor shuts securely, and weighs 1750g thanks to a 'kinetic polymer alloy' shell which from what we can work out is some sort of Kevlar rival. Ooh, and carbon detailing.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? This helmet has obvious versatility and plenty to brag about for the price. Modular helmets don't interest me… or they didn't until the epic June weather we had. The idea of being able to get a breeze in town and smile sweetly at grumpy garage cashiers really appeals.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? From £249.99 **ls2helmets.com**

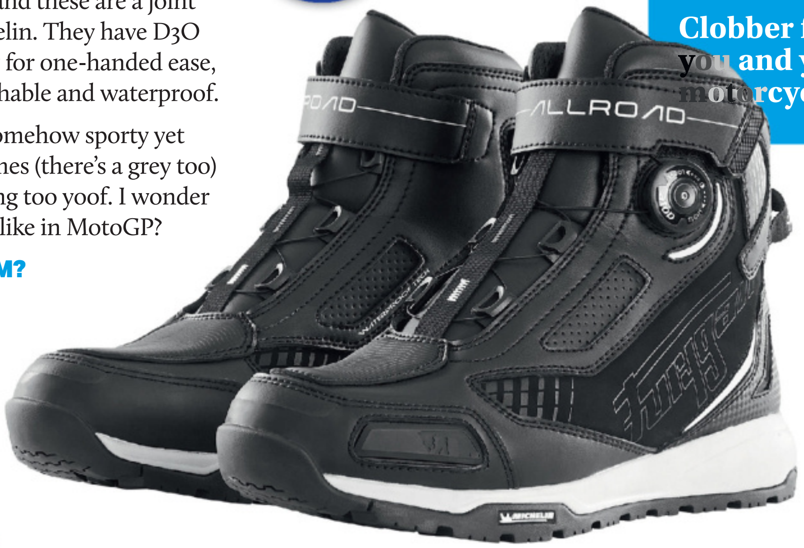
» Furygan Allroad D3O

PRICE
£209.99

WHAT IS IT? 'Collaborations' are all the rage, and these are a joint effort between French firms Furygan and Michelin. They have D3O ankle inserts, comfort and micrometric fastening for one-handed ease, plus a Michelin high-grip sole. The upper is breathable and waterproof.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Great styling; they're somehow sporty yet casual, with a hint of off-road… The colour schemes (there's a grey too) look neat to a younger rider like me without being too yoof. I wonder if the soles come in soft, medium and hard, like in MotoGP?

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?
£209.99 **furygan.com**



« Weise Citadel AAA

WHAT ARE THEY? Casual-looking riding jeans backed up with pukka AAA protection. They come with RE ZRO knee and hip armour, and are properly abrasion resistant but designed to remain lightweight and moveable. Sizes range from 30in to 42in waist.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? It looks non-bikey yet is just as safe as any other riding clobber – with an AAA rating no protection is sacrificed. Best bit with these is that they're single-layer – there's no weighty inner layer of aramid something or other to make you clammy on hot days.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £199.99 **weiseclothing.com**

PRICE
£199.99

» Pyramid waterproof 35-litre backpack

WHAT IS IT? Accessory specialists Pyramid are better known for screens and huggers, but do all sorts of other stuff. This waterproof rucksack has an air release valve so you can compress the load, padded shoulder straps for comfort, and outer pockets and strappy bits. It's made from heat-resistant and easy-clean 500D PVC.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? If you use a rucksack every day, this has everything you'd need – waterproofness, durability, and that air-release widget should make packing easy. It even looks good. PVC is also far easier to keep clean than a textile bag. And no one enjoys cleaning, do they?

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £49.99 **pyramidmoto.co.uk**

PRICE
£49.99

PYRAMID
DRY
PAK
35

SERIOUS.FUN
シリアス ファン
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8
GSX
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RETRO SPIRIT, NEXT GENERATION PERFORMANCE
BIKES.SUZUKI.CO.UK/8TT

Bike Next month

SUPERSPORT'S REVENGE

They're back and they're sensible (ish) – but will anyone buy them?

» We test the new Ducati Panigale V2, Yamaha R9 and Honda CBR600RR

FREE SPEED
Riding coaches, road testers and James Whitham reveal how to be faster and safer without spending a penny

NICK SANDERS
Our favourite globe-circling scruffbag gives his alternative guide to Europe

HONDA'S MOTOGP SAVIOUR
Romano Albesiano tells Mat Oxley how he's steering HRC's supertanker away from disaster

[PLUS]

» WORLD'S ANGRIEST RACER REVEALED » INSIDE LANGEN'S FACTORY » BMW S1000R SPORT LONG-TERM VERDICT

October issue on sale 20th August

WATCH SERIES 5 NOW AT BIKERTEK.CO.UK

How to become a better rider – now!

Series 5 Transform your riding skills this summer with expert riding advice from the teams at National Highways, MCN and Rapid Training

For most of us, this is the time of year when we're out on our bikes at every opportunity, enjoying those riding trips we planned in the dark months of winter. It's the perfect time to brush up on your skills, or pick up some new ones, so you can make this summer your smoothest, safest and most fun yet. That's where this new series of six videos comes in, designed to boost the skills of every level of motorcyclist.

1 Reading the road The single most transformational thing you can do for your riding is to improve your ability to see and interpret the road ahead. Every other skill you develop is built on this foundation. This video reveals how to use limit points to improve your cornering, how to scan without getting information overload, and using peripheral vision.

2 Braking Despite braking being the skill that's most likely to save us if things go wrong, it gets remarkably little attention. But your brakes are crucial not just for pulling up before you hit a car bonnet, but to create grip and generate confidence. We go to an airfield to prove how much more effective your front brake is compared to the rear, then head onto the road to explore how braking and steering, interact, when to use the rear brake, and why expert riders use their brakes more.

3 Overtaking Overtaking is one of the most complex aspects of riding a bike – there are dozens of variables and multiple hazards, usually served up with a fearsome dollop of closing speed. What we need is a way of ensuring we never miss another overtake, while still staying safe. Most motorcycles are overtaking weapons. But they can get us into trouble. We highlight the main risks, and explain the key techniques that could revolutionise your overtaking, making them safer and easier.

4 Junctions Junctions are the number one location for motorcycle accidents (corners are a close second). It's often car drivers who cause us problems at junctions, but we don't always help ourselves. Learn what to look for, understand why you may not be seen, what to do about modern cars' A-pillars, and how you can negotiate junctions to make yourself more visible.

5 STEERING Steering sounds like an easy skill to master, but if you don't understand exactly how to steer faster, you'll struggle to ride faster and smoother, and can get yourself in trouble if you need to avoid something in a hurry. Most riders know about countersteering, but that's just the start. Learn how long your steering input should be, why your lower body has such an effect on the steering, and how keeping your arms loose can dramatically improve how the bike tracks.

6 Throttle control The throttle does much more than just change your speed. We show how it can improve your cornering – increasing front-end grip and feel on entry, balancing the bike mid-corner, and creating grip on exit.

See all the videos now!

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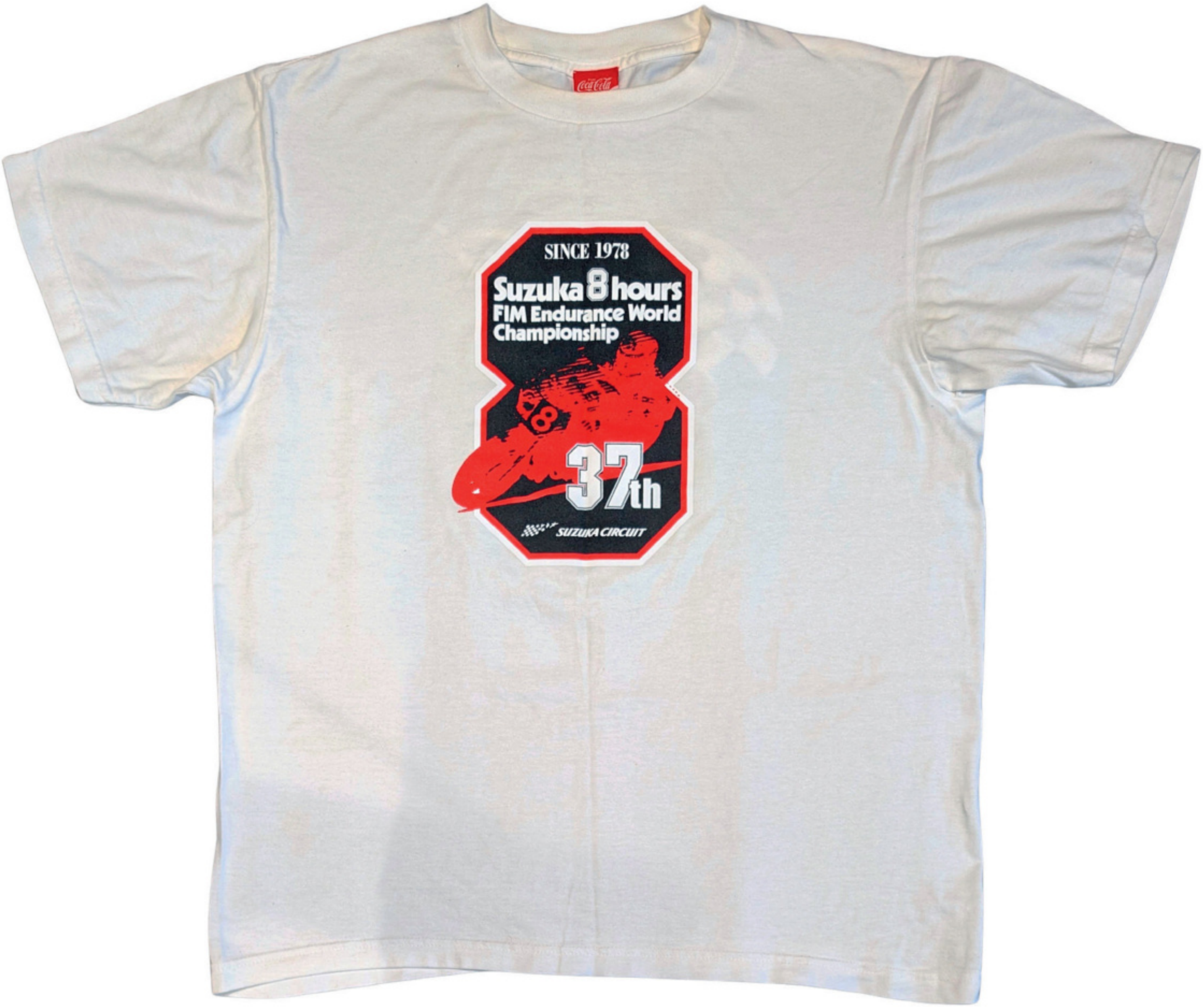


[BEEN THERE, GOT THE T-SHIRT]

'Suzuka 8 Hours coincided with Japan business trip – why not?'

I attended the Suzuka 8 Hours in 2014 because it coincided with a business trip to Japan – I thought, 'well why not?' I remember being excited to see 500GP legend Kevin Schwantz compete in the race, but he never made it onto the track because the first rider for his team totalled the bike early on. The consolation was Leon Haslam winning for the second straight year on a Honda.
Lawrence Alger

IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD T-SHIRT LIKE LAWRENCE'S AND FANCY SEEING IT IN *BIKE*, TAKE A PICTURE OF THE *WHOLE* SHIRT, ARMS INCLUDED, AND EMAIL IT TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IF WE PUBLISH IT WE'LL SEND YOU A NEW T-SHIRT.

[STAR LETTER]

‘Delight in the madness’

Your test of the Tracer 9 GT, with mentions of ‘grinding pegs’ and ‘showers of sparks’, triggered an old memory…

It’s the end of a summer day in 1981. I’m on my Honda H100A at a junction in a Sussex village, waiting as a bike comes towards me. It’s a water buffalo (Suzuki GT750) being ridden two-up at a good pace, and the rider is signalling left. He slows, swings into the turn… and realises that the turn is sharper than he expected, with an uphill gradient and adverse camber.

He leans the bike way over to the left, and everything grounds: pegs, stands, maybe the exhaust as well. Clattering, grinding, scraping, sparks all over the place. With a mighty heave on the bars he gets it upright again. But he’s overdone it – and the bike grounds on the right side. More grinding, scraping and sparks. With a mighty heave on the bars, he disproves the laws of physics and somehow gets the bike more or less vertical, still travelling in the right direction.

A tad more lean, and peg-scraping hilarity is assured

He drops a couple of gears and guns the throttle. They rocket up the hill and out of sight; the roar of the engine loud enough to split the summer peace. But it can’t hide the howls of laughter from rider and pillion as they delight in the madness.

Ah, happy days.

Geoff Brown

Marvellous engines

Another wonderful article by Jamie Turner on the engineering marvels that make up the internal combustion engines in our bikes (*Bike*, August).

As he says, should it all go wrong I am pleased I don’t ride a V-twin (or V4) Ducati. Indeed, as I have a brace of flat-twin BMWs my feet would be most at risk. But at least the crown jewels may survive.

Tim Tait

Imme, Imme, Imme

I’ve just finished reading Mark Graham’s article on the 1948 Riedel Imme (*Bike*, August). What an absolutely amazing machine!

Does anyone know where I could possibly see one of these?

John Connell

We know there’s one in Birmingham. Alas that’s Birmingham, Alabama, at the Barber Museum… JW

Recommended viewing

Loved the TT pieces in the August issue. Brought back memories of two visits to the island before kids. I’m hoping to go back with my son once he gets his full licence – blimey, it costs a few bob now.

DR-Z4s: £8k is too much, says Andy, but it still makes our Bike of the Year shortlist (p34)

The main reason for writing is to say it’s worth watching the 1935 film *No Limit* if you’ve been to the island, as some places haven’t changed a bit. Others have, like the road surface – although where I live the roads are degenerating so fast it’s only a matter of time.

Keep up the good work and varied content.

Nev Daytona

Lighter bikes, please

Paul Harvey’s letter in the July issue resonates with my thoughts that bikes are getting too heavy and, arguably, too complex.

As a biker of more than 50 years, I’ve never been without a motorcycle in the garage. But I nearly gave up when my new Tiger 900 Rally Pro slipped from my grasp when manoeuvring it up our sloping drive and I was unable to lift it without help. It had to go.

After weeks of research, dismissing anything heavier than 180kg and/or with a high centre of gravity – which was most of them – I ended up with a very short list. At the top was CCM’s Maverick, so I bought one. It’s a wonderful thing and always puts a smile on my face. Unfortunately, not enough of us bought into CCM’s concept.

But the research made me wonder: why are the major biking brands ignoring the increasing numbers of more mature bikers who don’t want A2 compliance, cruise control or adaptive stuff; just great engines and low weight?

Keep up the good work, *Bike*. And more of Jamie Turner please – he writes some fascinating articles on the oily bits.

Andy Baker

Too expensive

I was so interested in the Suzuki DR-Z4S, but I can’t believe a price tag of £8000… and that you believe it's worth it (*Bike*, August). Have you not seen the price tag of the new KTM 390s?

Suzuki won't sell many of these.

Andy Peers

Giddy-down

I read with concerned interest the 'singles' group test.

Everyone mentioned the Honda GB350S's lack of power. I ride a 1958 BSA 350 – 17 horsies new, some of which have probably fallen over by now. I could only dream of having 21!

Although, I would buy the Honda over the Triumph Speed 400. And I wouldn't tune it to match the Triumph. Instead, I'd use it as was intended – a nice gentle plodder around town.

Martin Hosking, Plymouth

GB350S: ideal for plodding to the newsagent to buy the next issue of *Bike*

Never on your own

In his interesting snapshot of the life of a novice trailie, Roland Brown stated he likes trail riding on his own (*Bike*, June). This really isn't a good idea, especially for a novice. Tumbles are part of the off-road life, but needing assistance following a spill can also come with the territory.

I've done it myself and regretted it. I fell into a 20cm-deep puddle of stinking muddy water in a wood and was pinned under the bike. I had to wait 10 minutes until a walker wearing wellies was able to lift the bike enough for me to wriggle free. Fortunately, all I suffered was ignominy.

Oh, and join the Trail Riders Fellowship – well worth it for novices and experienced alike.

Simon Scott

Trail riding with mates means they can get you out of a sticky situation (and take a photo of it)

Joey's dog marks

I enjoyed the article on Joey Dunlop in the TT section of the August issue.

It reminded me of another such article in *The Times* (May 26, 2025), which stated that Joey had a mark on his bike fairing for each dog he'd hit racing. Fifteen, apparently.

I've also hit a dog while riding. But whereas Joey kept going, the only time I ever hit one I fell off at 40mph. And wrecked the bike. Which belonged to the girl on the pillion seat who landed on top of me, adding to my pain.

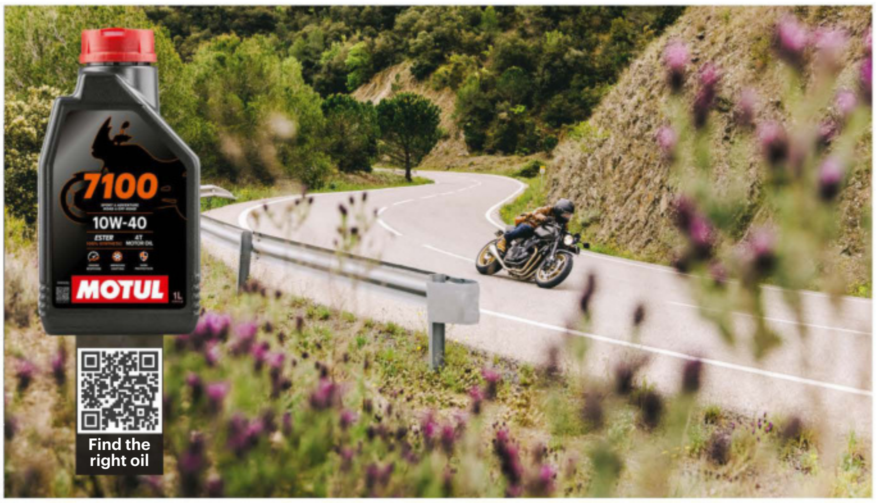
Was this outcome discrepancy because Joey was faster and infinitely more skilled ? Or because he enjoyed the luck of the Irish? Maybe I shouldn't moan about my luck. When the wounds had healed, the pillion and I married. And remain so 44 years later.

Andy Coe

Bikers or mikers?

Float this among your readers: as motorcyclists we should be referred to as 'mikers', and bicyclists – of which I am also one – should be called 'bikers'?

Raymond Duffy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Bike of the Year 2025

From bargain supernakeds and fresh-feeling sportsbikes to eye-opening new adventure models by fledgling firms, this year has been rather good for tip-top metal. But which is the greatest new bike of 2025? The bunfight starts here…

By The *Bike* extended family

The rules are refreshingly simple. To be eligible for consideration as Bike of the Year, motorcycles must be either spangly fresh new models or significantly reworked for this year. Reconfigured traction control and new paint don't cut it.

The judging is simple, too. While your assembly of journalists, testers, experts and know-it-alls take things like performance, handling, value and ergonomics into consideration, they're also instructed to ask themselves that all-important question: which one do I most want to ride? All the brochure-filling niceties and whizz-bang tech are pointless if it doesn't inspire you to ride.

Everyone votes for their top quintet, with five points awarded for a first place vote down to one for fifth. The scores are then collated, and the top trio are taken on a road trip by pedantic, fussy and argumentative types to decide the winner. And this year it's closer than ever.

BOTY 2025: all food groups represented…

PICS: ADAM SHORROCK, BAUER, MANUFACTURERS

Your experts are…

PHIL WEST Ex-*Bike* editor and established author has ridden every bike ever made. Well, almost. Quite tall.

JIM MOORE Full-time journo since the 1990s. Knows what he likes and not afraid to offer a strong opinion.

PAUL LANG Ex-*Bike* shapes and colours chap, and lover of great design. Good at getting in a flap, too.

CHRIS NEWBIGGING Worked for *Performance Bikes* and *Practical Sportsbikes*, current contributor to *MCN* and *Bike*.

MICHAEL NEEVES Full-time road tester for *MCN* for well over two decades. Also a brisk racer and fine drummer.

MARTIN FITZ-GIBBONS Ex-*Bike* road tester blessed with inquisitive nature and enormous brain. Doesn't shave often.

MIKE ARMITAGE Departing *Bike* editor, fish and chip enthusiast. Fond of slightly left-field machinery as well as old two-strokes.

SIMON HARGREAVES If it has two wheels and an engine, Simon's likely ridden it and written about it. Plays bass, too.

CARL STEVENS Speedy racer and road tester, turned deputy editor for *MCN*. Enjoys lovely hair.

ROLAND BROWN Ex-racer, ex-*Bike* deputy editor, freelance road test master for many decades. Knows a thing or ten.

JOHN WESTLAKE Ex-*Bike* editor who's contributed to the mag since Jurassic times. As keen on TFTs and decent fuel range as air-cooled charm.

15 Voge DS900X

» The Chinese aren't coming – they're here. This BMW F900GS knock-off has a few rough edges but more gadgets than any other, with dashcam, heated seats and grips, luggage… it goes on. At just over £9000, it's brilliant for the money. **SH**

14 Yamaha Ténéré 700

» The best adventure bike for actually adventuring, made better than ever. **CN**

» The bike that re-energised the midsize adventure world, with an even better dynamic and a keeping-up-with-everyone tech level. Still top value. **MA**

13 Kove 450RR

» Who doesn't love a screaming inline-four race rep? **JM**

» Not like the 400cc race reps of old, but better: more power (70bhp), more tech, less weight. Hopefully we will be able to actually buy one soon. **MA**

12 CFMoto 675 SR-R

» Three-cylinder 88bhp motor is easy to use, front-end feel is fab, build quality seems good, it has a four-year warranty… and it costs four grand less than a CBR600RR. **MN**

» Could well be the best Chinese bike yet. **JM**

11 Suzuki DR-Z4S

» The return of the proper trail thumper. The DR-Z4S's chassis flatters and cossets in gentle use, yet it doesn't underwhelm ex-motocross nuts who use words like 'gnarly' and 'rad' entirely unironically. Feels right on the money. **CN**

10 Ducati Panigale V4 S

» So good that it'll always make you feel inadequate. You have to tip your hat to Ducati for creating a road-legal bike that's almost as fast as Pecco's MotoGP bike round Misano. **MN**

» Could be the best sportsbike ever built. **CS**

9 Kawasaki Ninja 1100 SX

» Heavily updated – perhaps more than many people realise – and all the shiny new parts work. Outstanding sports tourer, and great value. **JM**

» Proof that not everything needs a twin-cylinder motor and adventure styling. **MA**

8 Ducati Streetfighter V2

» Could it prove the finest Sunday afternoon bike ever? Ace road-tuned engine, semi-active, decent riding position, looks the bollocks. **JW**

» Detailing is exceptional; it's perfectly manicured. Hard to believe it's mass-produced. **SH**

Sounds neat, rides neat… looks fabulous

7 Triumph Speed Twin 1200 RS

» Past BOTY winner, still mega pretty. Shame the sweepy-needle clocks have been ditched, but in every other way this is top class. **PL**

» The best Triumph parallel twin yet – and there have been a few good ones. **RB**

» Supernakeds are super, but also a bit much for me these days. The RS basically does the same thing but feels way nicer at sensible-ish speed. **MA**

Simple, dependable, amazing value

6 Honda GB350S

» I love the GB350S's simplicity, the way it makes you smile… and its sub-£4000 price tag. It under-promises and over-delivers in spades. **MN**

» So cute, I want to stroke it and put it in a hutch in the garage. **PW**

» Proper Honda quality, utterly charming, and so affordable you could have one as a second bike alongside your zillion-horsepower RR SP TE whatever. **MA**

The bike that saves KTM? Could well be

5 KTM 390 Adventure R

» I could do proper adventures on this. Plus, it doesn't look like a poxy 390 Duke with long forks. **JW**

» KTM's bigger adventure range is so good, yet the 390 has always been a bit average for the dirty stuff. This R has the capability of the higher-capacity offerings, for an awesome price in a massive segment. **CS**

» Looks superb value for green-laning, but also for plenty more. **RB**

4 Ducati Panigale V2 S

» I'm slow and fat, and sportsbikes are all too fast these days. This could be the bike that makes me fall in love with them again. **MFG**

» At last – a proper Ducati sportsbike aimed at road riders, not irrelevant lap times. **MA**

» The looks, the badge, the tech… and we all know the 'little' brother Panigale is always better on the road. And £2200 cheaper than the outgoing lump, too. **PL**

> 'At last – a proper Ducati sportsbike aimed at road riders'

All the Panigale theatre – and a relative bargain

Podium in the Peaks

And now, your main event. The top three places in our **2025 Bike of the Year** countdown, settled over a 250-mile jaunt through the stunning Peak District

By **Martin Fitz-Gibbons** Photography **Adam Shorrock**

And then there were three. Yamaha's R9, Triumph's Tiger Sport 800 and Honda's CB1000 Hornet SP. After totting up the votes, this trio stand proudly atop our ranking. But which is our winner, earning a spot in history as 2025's Bike of the Year?

With the scores so close, we need further investigation to decide the final podium positions. An award this important can't be handed out on the basis of mere mathematics, the vagaries of personal predilections, or whoever's voice shouts loudest in the *Bike* office. No, this calls for motorcycling's most forensic analytical arena: a ride somewhere nice.

The scene was set. We'd round up the rostrum rivals and pitch them head-to-head-to-head over a 250-mile trip to the Peak District, the UK's original national park. These are the lengths to which we'll go in the name of authoritative adjudication – it's definitely not an excuse to blast about on some blisteringly good bikes in one of England's loveliest riding regions in the middle of summer…

HONDA CB1000 HORNET SP

» £10,099 » 1000cc inline four » 155bhp

Fireblade power and brand-name bling for £10k.

YAMAHA R9

» £12,254 » 890cc inline triple » 117bhp

Supersports precision meets stonking midrange.

TRIUMPH TIGER SPORT 800

» £10,995 » 798cc inline triple » 113bhp

More than 30 years of Hinckley genius in one bike.

Supernaked v all-rounder v sportsbike. . . and so hard to split

Bargain on the back roads

Editor Armitage leads us away from *Bike*'s gold-plated lock-ups and sets a secret cross-country course. He navigates a network of hand-picked back roads with the wily experience of a man who's ridden every possible combination, back and forth, over and over again, for more than 20 years. From Cambridgeshire via Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and into Derbyshire, there can't be a slicker, quicker or quieter way to cover these 100 miles. It's like he has an allergy to main roads, twisting, turning and darting off down nameless lanes that other traffic seems blissfully unaware of.

Trying to keep up, Honda's CB1000 Hornet SP is proving unexpectedly feisty. Its predecessors – from the original Hornet 900 through the more modern CB1000Rs – were all pleasant, well-mannered, fairly sensible street bikes. This latest iteration, however, has discovered a naughty streak. Its exhaust snarls loudly and angrily, something you first notice when you fire it up, then again at 5700rpm when a valve in the exhaust system opens. Winding up the detuned/retuned 2017 Fireblade engine unleashes an addictive, rasping howl – along with a startling turn of speed.

Trundle along sedately and the Hornet's every bit as delightfully docile as you expect, all lovely low-speed manners and 30mph-in-sixth politeness. But pass into the top half of its rev range and the Hornet screams along with way more firepower than I'd anticipated, feeling every bit of its claimed 155bhp. Driving hard out of slow corners, or punching down an undulating B-road, it charges along with so much raw urgency it sends the front end light. Well, sometimes…

The weak link in the Hornet's potent powertrain is its electronics, particularly how the combined traction control and anti-wheelie reacts to 'spirited' acceleration. Crack the throttle hard and the Honda may deliver a rush of pulse-raising, wheel-lifting thrust – or you may instead get a flashing orange TC light on the dash. Perhaps the lack of an IMU, that clever box of gyros and acceleration sensors (which both the R9 and Tiger have), is showing up here.

And that, in turn, may be because Honda chose to spend the Hornet's R&D budget not on zeros and ones, but on physical components you can see and touch. This SP boasts a gleaming Öhlins TTX shock and delicious Brembo Stylema calipers – the kind of componentry you'd normally expect to find on high-end, big-money flagships, not something costing £10,099. 'The Hornet makes everything else look under-specced, overpriced, or both,' reckons Mike.

On smooth roads the Hornet handles beautifully – poised, planted and precise. It hauls up sharply and turns in easily, the chassis resolutely keeping its composure no matter how much I try to fluster it. Bumpier routes, however, can be rough. The shock's stock set-up is seriously stiff, but dialling back some damping improves the ride. Those flash-looking adjusters really do work.

As we near the edge of the Peak District, a small naggy nugget of my brain can't help wonder whether this whole thing isn't a bit of a foregone conclusion. After all, of the three bikes here the Honda has a) the

Phenomenal spec sheet, excellent motor. We still can't believe it's £10k

Easily keeps up with the other two – all without needing to master contortion

biggest engine, b) the most cylinders, c) the highest power and torque figures, d) the poshest brand-name parts, and crucially, e) the cheapest price tag. That's a compelling opening salvo – how could anything else put forth a more convincing case? The most bike for the least money is pretty hard to argue with.

Supersports meets stone walls

While the Honda is far sportier than I'd expected, it's a lavender bubble bath and memory-foam slippers next to Yamaha's R9. Pulled over in a lay-by on the A515 – a once-great romp through a limestone landscape of open fields and rolling hills long-since tempered by 50mph limits – I'm trying to fold myself onto this sharp-looking supersports successor. But it's proving awkward, like finding you can't do up the zip on a pair of old jeans you've found at the back of the wardrobe.

Nothing wrong with the bike, to be clear. The R9's wrist-down, bum-up stance could have been photocopied directly from the discontinued R6. Overlaying side-ons of the two bikes reveals their seats and bar end positions are virtually identical. It's a riding position I'm familiar with – a few years ago I rode an R6 from Calais to Montpellier in a day, no bother. Only it turns out 'a few' is actually 15 years, and that deal with the ergonomic devil is much easier to make when you're in your 20s. For three riders in their 40s and 50s, there's a bit more haggling involved today.

What's immediately clear is that any ill-informed bluster dismissing the R9 as 'just an MT-09 in a frock' can be ignored. Sure, the engine is from the MT, but that's about all they share. The R9 has a bespoke frame, fatter 43mm forks, and even inherits cast wheels from the R6 instead of the MT's spin-forged hoops. It's an authentic, sincere, serious sportsbike.

'The R9 feels as flickable and front-end fixated as any 600 ever was'

Ducking and diving between Derbyshire's dry stone walls, the R9 feels as firm, flickable and front-end fixated as any 600 ever was. It's the lightest of our trio, with the sharpest steering geometry and the shortest wheelbase. Down through the tumbling hairpins outside Crowdecote it tips keenly onto its side, delivers feel and feedback almost intravenously, and eggs you on to carry more corner speed with each bend.

Where the R9 differs dramatically from the supersports sensation of years gone by is its power delivery. The 890cc triple has a permanently stocked supply of instant grunt, ensuring surging, gurgling acceleration is never more than a tweak of the twistgrip away, irrespective of gear or revs. There's never any waiting for the engine to come on cam, and no need to keep pistons busy. At the kind of revs the R9's plentiful power tops out (10,000rpm), an R6 wouldn't have even reached peak torque yet.

It's a revelation: 1000cc flexibility meets 600cc thrashability. The R9 puts down its 117bhp with more

Beresford Tea Rooms

Beresford's peaceful morning is ruined as bickering begins over the winner

The blueprint for the modern supersports machine. It's a hoot on roads like these focus and less flamboyance than an MT-09 too, driving forwards rather than upwards. That's partly thanks to the wrist-heavy stance putting weight over the front wheel; partly thanks to taller gearing, with two fewer teeth on its rear sprocket; and almost no thanks to the fairing's integrated winglets, though they do look smart.

'Not sure about the R9's headlight though,' ponders designer Langy. 'It looks like a fat man's belly button.' Naval-gazing aside, if you want to bring together a legitimate sportsbike chassis with one of the best road engines ever assembled, the R9 is where you'll find it.

Prowling through the Peaks

You may imagine an affordable mid-range all-rounder would feel rather flat and lifeless after Yamaha's rampant, World Supersport-conquering R9. But curiously, it doesn't. The two bikes' triples are split by just 92cc. Their pistons are the same diameter. The Tiger's 113bhp is just four shy of the R9's. And while it may be a touch down on torque, factor in the Triumph's shorter gearing and *Bike*'s office abacus reckons the Tiger actually delivers more thrust than the R9 in second gear. And third. And fourth, fifth and sixth. In a side-by-side roll-on test, it even keeps up with the Hornet. It's a total sleeper.

Overlooking the Tiger Sport 800 as yet another middle-of-the-road middleweight is understandable. Triumph have pumped out plenty of Tigers over the years, as well as Tiger Sports, and even Tiger 800s. It doesn't help that the new bike looks almost identical to the 660 version, nor that it's numerically inferior to the unremarkable Tiger Sport 850 it replaces in Triumph's line-up. Casting an eye over its componentry doesn't unearth any coo-worthy surprises either – unbranded brake calipers, semi-adjustable Showa suspension, and the same LCD/TFT dash that we saw on the budget Trident four years ago.

But to ride, the Tiger Sport 800 is sublime. At first it's friendly and welcoming, bringing together the most spacious riding position, the best wind protection and the comfiest seat of the three bikes. Slicing through a small single-track valley splitting steep, stony slopes, the Tiger's suspension is plush and obliging, with the most forgiving ride quality here. Handling is easy, eager and agile – it flits along effortlessly and with a reassuring sure-footedness.

We hit the gloriously involving B5053, which romps through an enticing variety of rural farmland, short straight-line sprints, quaint villages, tricky technical sequences and gawp-or-you'll-miss-it scenery. As the pace picks up, the Tiger keeps on getting better. It may be the least powerful bike here, the heaviest and the least flashy, but once again it demolishes preconceptions. The Tiger hustles with tangible intent and convincing spirit – its light, accurate steering dovetailing with the gutsy, free-revving triple to do a remarkably convincing impression of a high-rise, half-faired Street Triple. It's an absolute riot.

'I was not expecting a huge amount from the Tiger,' admits Mike.

> **'The Tiger hustles with tangible intent and convincing spirit – it's an absolute riot'**

Never has the phrase 'don't judge a book by its cover' been so accurate

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It's a unanimous decision – the all-rounder takes the title

'The Tiger delights when you're at the controls – and that's where it matters'

'It's hardly groundbreaking on paper, and it's not the kind of bike I'd dream of opening my garage door to. But it's everything modern-era Triumph have learned, in one slick package. It's brilliant.'

And it never wants to stop delivering that brilliance. By 140 miles the Hornet's dash is showing the fuel warning light, while the R9's range countdown has given up guessing and just shows 'Lo' instead. The Tiger, meanwhile, could easily go another 60 miles, maybe even 80, before needing to stop. So could I – the Triumph is physically far less demanding than gripping on to the exposed Honda, or squidged up on the compact R9. And critically, it's every bit as enjoyable to ride. When it comes time to retrace our steps and tackle the two-hour ride home, everyone wants to be on the Triumph.

Verdict

Yamaha's R9 represents a both a welcome rethink and a much-needed reset for the supersports class. Gone are the sky-high revs and lacklustre response at regular speeds, replaced by one of the most eager, full-bodied and animated powerplants ever to grace a road bike. It's a full-on sportsbike, complete with a full-on sportsbike riding position that definitely won't accommodate all riders. But if it preserves supersports

Three very different motorcycles, but all streets ahead of the 2025 competition

purity and precision for a fresh generation, we're all for it. It takes third step on our rostrum.

The best-value new bike of the year is surely Honda's CB1000 Hornet SP. It proves that established manufacturers can build desirable, exciting, high-quality bikes for affordable prices. To get a proper made-in-Japan Honda packing this much performance for just a sniff over £10k is exceptional. It doesn't just undercut other supernakeds, it's less than some sporty street bikes an entire capacity class below. That definitely deserves a silver medal.

But after a full day riding in the company of some seriously stiff competition, Triumph's Tiger Sport 800 stands tall. Perhaps it's not the most eye-catching, the most headline-grabbing or the most jaw-droppingly innovative, granted. But it's the bike we want to keep on riding, constantly delivering and delighting when you're at the controls – and that's where it matters. Like the R9 it has a sumptuously snappy engine, plus modern luxuries like cruise control, a two-way quickshifter and lean-sniffing rider aids. Like the Hornet it's instantly welcoming and offers the kind of value for money that'll cause rivals sleepless nights.

For bringing together so many of the qualities that make a motorcycle great in 2025, the Tiger Sport 800 is our worthy and well-deserved Bike of the Year.

‘You learn how to navigate the cesspool’

Few MotoGP riders are more fun to interview than **Jack Miller**. The Aussie talks the murky world of paddock politics, how he spends £250,000 on racing each season, and how Yamaha’s MotoGP fightback is coming along

By **Mat Oxley** Photography **Michelin, Pramac, Red Bull**

I arrive at Pramac Yamaha’s paddock hospitality a few minutes early for my one-on-one with Jack Miller. (Important note: don’t be late for interviews with MotoGP riders because they’ll never forgive you.)

As I’m walking up the stairs to the first floor, Miller is on his way down, in a hurry. ‘Sorry, mate,’ he says. ‘I need to go for a shit.’

Miller returns ten minutes later, laughing. ‘I couldn’t even sit down on the centre of the scooter on my way to the motorhome – I was about to shit myself and I ain’t kidding.’ You can take the Aussie out of Australia, but you can’t take Australia out of the Aussie.

This is the 30-year-old’s 11th season as MotoGP’s Aussie out of Australia. During that time he has signed factory contracts with Honda, Ducati and KTM, and been sacked by Honda, Ducati and KTM. So he knows all about how the paddock works. One moment you’re the beloved son of a factory family, the next you’re out on your ear. That’s what happened this time last year when he got a surprise call from his boss at KTM.

‘The last I heard was: “Don’t bother talking to anyone because we want to keep you in the family,”’ Miller told us at the time. ‘Then you get a phone call three hours before the press release gets launched, saying you’re not getting a contract.’

The Oxley interview

Mat is a TT winner, endurance racer, author and MotoGP paddock insider

Welcome back to Pramac: Miller's loving his return, now on a Yamaha

> 'The pay cheque is fantastic… but I'm here because I love it and I'd probably ride for free if I had to'

DE FRANCE
lans 2014
Red Bull
KTM

Celebrating Moto3 success at Le Mans, 2014

Miller loves being a MotoGP rider, but he's been around long enough to know the paddock is every bit as mean, nasty and dirty as the racetrack. 'The paddock has taught me a lot of things,' he chuckles. 'You learn how to navigate the cesspool, I guess you could call it. You learn your way.

'You really get to understand it – it's weird, but it works – so I wouldn't want to change it. It's weirdest for outsiders, like Ruby [Miller's wife], who came in here as a complete outsider and had to learn how to navigate this world and learn how people are.'

So, does he tell his missus who to avoid? 'Yeah, there are some people you talk to and you mutter "wanker" as you walk away,' says Miller. 'There are always people putting the knife in and twisting it, but I wouldn't change it for the world.

'Having Ruby come over, building the family [their daughter Pip was born in 2023] and travelling with them is unreal, and doing this job at the level I do it is fantastic.'

The Millers live in Andorra during the season, like half the grid, but they're not members of MotoGP's private-jet set.

'We're on the Vueling [a Spanish low-cost airline],' says Miller. 'I've only been on three private jets in my life. Two of them were rented for me by Cal [Crutchlow, one of Miller's best mates] and last year the little one got really crook on the Sunday night at Jerez. Ruby took Pip to hospital while we were testing on the Monday and I was, like, "we're not getting on the 11pm flight home", so we got a private plane. Otherwise, I can't justify it.'

Many fans want to know how much MotoGP riders earn, but they'll never tell you, so we get to talking about how much MotoGP riders spend.

'The motorhome is eighty-five [thousand Euros, or £71,000] a season, my assistant's salary is fifty [£42,000], plus thirty-five [£30,000] for his flights and travel, then two business seats for me and Ruby [for long-haul races] and we'll soon need another for Pip. That's all before [long-haul] hotels, which I don't even count because I book them on a card. Then there's training bikes [various dirt bikes and a Yamaha R6 he rides around go-kart tracks to build racing muscles], training tyres and everything else. I'd say we're close to 300 [£250,000] a year.'

And that's if you don't get hurt.

'Pinning and plating a collarbone is about eight [£6700], depending on what needs doing. I've done that a few times. The last one was getting the plates out, which was eight and a half [£7000]. They got everything out apart from a screw up near my neck. They said they weren't going to cut that near to my neck, so they left the screw in.

Dangling off the corner-loving M1 in Qatar

'Arm-pump surgery is ten [£8500] for one arm. That's the only thing I would change in my career – I should have gone for that earlier. I had the surgery in 2021 and again this year. The arm pump was causing me problems, more at some tracks than others, but you talk yourself out of it, thinking you can work around it with physio and stretching. At the end of the day, it's better to lop your arms open and let the muscles breathe a bit more. That was a game changer for me.'

When Miller first arrived in MotoGP – 125cc GPs in 2012, two seasons of Moto3, then straight into the premier class – he was the paddock wild child: drinking, partying and generally carrying on.

'It was very challenging with Jack when he was young,' says Aki Ajo, Miller's business manager and previously his Moto3 team boss. 'All the stories! Maybe I can tell you them in 20 years!'

I ask Miller to tell me some stories from his carousing days, when he gloried in the nickname Jackass, but he's not keen. These days he's a finely honed pro-athlete, even though he's sat next to me chewing nicotine gum.

'The nicotine started as a weight thing – you're not as hungry, so it keeps the weight off. Then I got addicted and here we are – I have no other fucking vices in my life!'

Not like ten years ago when he signed with Honda for his rookie MotoGP season.

'2015 was the only year when I was tossing about too much and should have applied myself more,' Miller admits.

‘I enjoy the Yamaha because it does everything naturally… It feels more fluid and it’s really comforting’

On the mezcal with Jeremy McWilliams, Assen, 2016 – his first MotoGP victory

‘I rocked up proud as ass and sort of chased my ass the whole year. That was a real growing thing. But apart from that, honestly, I have always tried to extract the best out of the machine I’m on.’

Miller has won four MotoGP races – one with Honda, three with Ducati – and scored more than 20 podiums with Honda, Ducati and KTM. Now he’s part of Yamaha’s fightback from the doldrums, riding YZR-M1s for the independent Pramac team, which runs the same bikes as factory riders Fabio Quartararo and Alex Rins. Some fans were surprised when he landed a Yamaha ride following a gloomy 2024 with KTM. But the lack of results wasn’t his fault, because the RC16 had been destroyed by Michelin’s super-grippy rear slick, which caused massive chatter.

Miller was immediately back on the pace when he climbed aboard the Yamaha this year.

‘I’m getting zero vibration. That’s why I’ve got a smile on my face, because the rear tyre isn’t trying to fall out of the bike every time I go into a corner,’ he said during the season-opening Thailand GP.

He qualified fourth in Thailand and finished fifth in the US (both ahead of Yamaha superstar Quartararo), and battled for a podium at Silverstone (where Quartararo led until his ride-height device failed).

Miller’s job is to help Yamaha get back towards the front of the pack, alongside Pramac team-mate Miguel Oliveira and

Jack Miller CV

Born: 18th January 1995 **Lives:** Andorra/Australia
- **2011** Not placed 125cc world championship
- **2012** 23rd Moto3 world championship
- **2013** 7th Moto3 world championship
- **2014** 2nd Moto3 world championship
- **2015** 19th MotoGP world championship
- **2016** 18th MotoGP world championship
- **2017** 11th MotoGP world championship
- **2018** 13th MotoGP world championship
- **2019** 8th MotoGP world championship
- **2020** 7th MotoGP world championship
- **2021** 4th MotoGP world championship
- **2022** 5th MotoGP world championship
- **2023** 11th MotoGP world championship
- **2024** 14th MotoGP world championship

Quartararo and Alex Rins. Yamaha currently runs an inline-four engine, whereas Aprilia, Ducati, Honda and KTM all use V4s, which are faster but less fluid to ride. And after ten years on all kinds of V4s – Miller is loving the M1.

'I enjoy the Yamaha because it does everything naturally. You've always got to fight on a MotoGP bike, but getting the KTM turned was a real fight.

'And the feeling with the KTM was a bit unnatural in the way you got feedback out of it. You almost had to learn a new sense to understand what was going on with the tyres underneath you and where you were at with the front tyre, because it gave you a sense of overconfidence and suddenly you were down and you didn't understand what had happened.

'I've had a few front-end tucks with the Yamaha and pretty much all of them I know what went wrong and what I can try to do better next time around to fix that.'

When Miller goes deep into riding technique, you feel like you are his crew chief during a post-race debrief. Here, Miller takes us through Turns Two and Three at Silverstone – Farm and Village. Farm is a 120mph left that leads into the 60mph Village right, so you want to keep a tighter-than-ideal line through Farm so you're not too far right for the fastest line through Village.

'The bikes I've ridden in the past, you have to crack it sideways out of Two to keep the natural cornering arc to put yourself in the right part of the track coming into Three,' he says. 'Otherwise the thing wants to drift wide, so then you're too far to the right coming into Three. The Yamaha keeps a nice natural turning, so you don't have to crack it sideways. Then when you

Red Bull Ring on the KTM last year. No sponsor pressure then...

> ‘I already loved this sport, but it makes you love it even more when you get to work with a great group of people’

Above: this is what job satisfaction looks like

With daughter Pip and Pramac gaffer Paolo Campinoti

go for the brakes for Three you don’t get a big kickback from the tyre sliding then grabbing back traction. It feels more fluid and it’s really comforting.’

This is the difference between the M1 and its V4 rivals. An inline-four’s longer crankshaft stabilises the motorcycle, so it likes taking sweeping cornering lines that create lots of corner speed. A V4’s crankshaft is shorter, so the bike is twitchier, so it prefers sharper stop-and-go cornering lines. Therefore, the M1 needs a clear track to exploit its corner-speed advantage.

‘It’s tough when you get in a dogfight with the boys on V4s,’ Miller adds. ‘We’ve got a really strong package, but we’ve got to ride our lines and keep momentum up, while they’re able to park it, squirt it.’

This is one of several reasons behind Yamaha’s decision to park its M1, introduced in 2002, and replace it with an all-new V4 machine. There are others: a V4 produces more power, because its shorter crankshaft makes a more robust engine, and its park-it-squirt-it dynamics make it better in a dogfight.

Will Miller be involved in the V4 project? He doesn’t know yet because he’s on a one-year contract. But the fact Yamaha’s Japanese bosses have asked him to contest July’s prestigious Suzuka 8 Hours endurance race aboard a factory R1 suggests they believe in his talent for riding and developing machinery.

‘Year by year, I still feel deep down that I’m getting better and better and I still feel like the best is to come. I know you hear that from many athletes, but I do feel I’ve got more to give.’

Miller is delighted to be back at Pramac, where he raced Ducatis from 2018-2020. The Pramac team is owned by businessman Paolo Campinoti, one of the paddock’s more flamboyant characters, so the Italian and the Aussie get on well. No need to mutter ‘wanker’ here…

‘I have a great relationship with Paolo, he’s very honest with me, so that side of things is fantastic,’ says Miller. ‘And it’s awesome to have a real rapport with the guys in the team. I was already in love with this sport, but it makes you love it even more when you get to work with a great group of people who love it equally as much. I don’t not enjoy any of it – press interviews, sponsor events or whatever – I enjoy everything.

‘I do the majority of it for the love. I’m not here for the pay cheque. The pay cheque is fantastic and I’m very fortunate to do what I do and be able to put away the money I’ve been able to put away. But I’m here because I love it and I’d probably ride for free if I had to.’

Just don’t tell Campinoti…

NEXT ISSUE Mat learns more about Honda’s MotoGP revival from their new tech chief **Romano Albesiano**

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TURN

> ‘Your brain is working so hard to process all the visual information that time stops and you exist in a mesmeric bubble of pure concentration’

No pressure. Just ride up the rocky cliff face with hundreds of people waiting for you to bin it

No sleep till Redruth

Fancy doing something achievable yet ludicrous? The Land's End Trial is 16 hours of mud, rocks and bacon sarnies. And it's utterly fantastic…

By **John Westlake**

At 9.42pm on a drizzly April evening I'm waved away by the cheery start team of Britain's longest long-distance trial. Ahead lie 16 gnarly trials sections and 243 miles of trails and lanes that wriggle from Bridgwater in Somerset to Redruth in Cornwall. It's a 16-hour test of skill, endurance and navigation. And by 9.43pm I'm lost. I somehow miss the exit and tour Bridgwater Rugby Club car park wondering where everyone's gone until a sniggering attendant waves me out onto the main road. This idiocy is, as I fear, a sign of things to come.

In fact, there's been a healthy dollop of idiocy already. One of my accomplices, Rupert Paul (former *Bike* staffer and a very clever man), sourced a natty 3D-printed road book reader from the internet that looked like a great buy. The Land's End Trial requires some way of reading the massive list of navigation instructions and his purchase saved him £50 on the pukka rally-spec boxes the rest of us stumped up for.

But as his bike sits out in the rain while we wait for our starts, water seeps into the plastic box, leaching

PICS: JOHN WESTLAKE, ADAM SMALLMAN, JOHN BENTHAM, ANDREW TRENOWETH

You don't see bar muffs much in the Dakar. Odd that

The crack squad assembles

out the printer dye of his directions like some GCSE chemistry experiment. And when Rupe turns the roller to find some words that don't look like a hippy tie-dye disaster, the soggy paper rips. 'I've got an hour and some Sellotape,' he says. 'I'll fix it.'

Or indeed not. Shortly after escaping the car park, I see Rupe by the roadside trying to decipher his litmus paper experiment. We decide the best thing is that he follows me, and we head out towards Exmoor and the coast.

My rose-tinted prediction was that this will be an ethereal wonderland, with the full moon bathing the sea and Moors with silvery light as we chuff through the scenery on our little bikes. Well, that doesn't happen. It's pissing down, and as we climb on to Exmoor the fog is so bad I slow to 10mph as all I can see is a bright white ball surrounding my fancy new LED headlight bulb.

We're on titchy, squiggly lanes with slippery grass down the middle, and 10mph feels sketchy – I keep swerving left in panic as the verge disappears, only to eventually work out they're passing places. I can't see anything.

I stop and ask Rupe to have a go in front as I fear there's something wrong with my eyes. But no, he fares no better, though we do eventually catch some other riders which makes matters easier – at least then we can follow their lights at 8mph. At some point we do the first trials section, but all I can remember is that bouncing up a rocky path seems a lot easier than riding down slimy roads with grass in the middle.

After the section there's a wet, rutty trail that winds its way up a gentle hill. My Suzuki DR250 chugs along happily in second gear, the Pirelli MT43s finding grip despite the slimy conditions. I'm musing that this is a lot more technical than the rocky section we've just done when I spy a red tail light at a height and position consistent with a motorcycle resting in a hedge. As I get closer I see its rider clambering out from underneath.

I pull up behind so he can use my light to see what he's doing as he hoiks his KTM upright. He's flustered but seems fine and roars off. Then, 20m later, I watch him give the KTM a handful, the rear steps out and he's on his arse again. This time he's damaged his phone holder and he gives the phone to me, telling me to look after it. Sure I say, putting it in my pocket, wondering why he can't put it in his. Before I can ask, he's back on his bike and fishtailing off into the night. I've no idea who he is. I didn't even see his event number. Odd.

Eventually Rupe and I arrive at the village of Barbrook. From largely existing in a glowing ball of foggy isolation, we suddenly arrive at a brightly lit petrol station that stays open for the event, with hundreds of bikes and riders milling about. Across the road locals are dishing out tea and cake in the packed village hall. Heaven may well look like this. I hand Mystery Man's phone to an official who promises to do something with it. Sell it, perhaps.

Buoyed by refreshments, Rupe adjusts his chain in an optimistic attempt to lessen a gear change problem he's having with his Moto Morini Kanguro, which has a linkage from the gearbox output shaft on the right that goes across to the left, presumably to ensure it doesn't work well. Futile adjustments made, we head off.

The next section poses no problems for my DR250. The little Suzuki scampers up the rocky climb and I'm so confident in its ability to make me look competent that I stop in a restart box.

You have to stop between the Rs. Then you fall off

Breakfast stop at 9am after 12 hours of riding

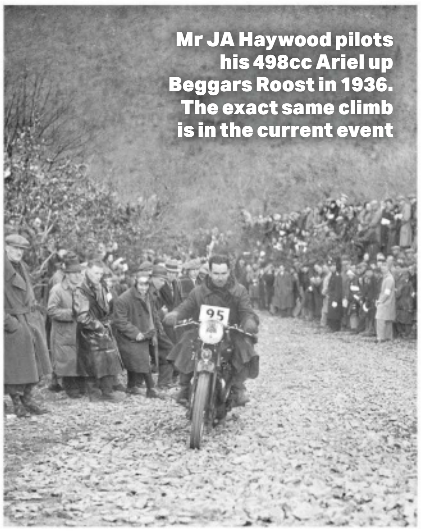
LAND'S END TRIAL 2025
102

That's a backlit road book bolted to the bars. Essential

You want history? The LET has plenty

The first Land's End Trial (LET) was held in 1908 – it was the London to Land's End Reliability Trial back then. Like today's trial it was for cars and bikes, but to start with the focus was more on distance rather than getting through tricky terrain. As vehicles got more reliable it evolved into a test of trials skills coupled with the demand of getting no sleep.

Where possible the event uses sections that were on the early routes. This photo of a section called Beggars Roost in Devon is from 1936 – we did it this year in the middle of the night. From what I remember, it was in better condition in 1936. Other excellently named sections are Felon's Oak (first used in 1955), named because a nearby tree was used for hanging crims; and Crackington (first used in 1936), which is famous for being covered in slurry by farmers just before competitors arrive…



Mr JA Haywood pilots his 498cc Ariel up Beggars Roost in 1936. The exact same climb is in the current event

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motool

These hateful inventions are thrown in by the organisers to make the sections even more difficult – just when you have your momentum going for a tricky bit, you have to come to a full stop in a box. Cue loads of wheelspin, wheelies and wobbling as you try to get going.

I wait at the top of the trail for Rupe and use the time to congratulate myself on buying the DR. Getting the French import registered was annoyingly difficult (*Bike*, August) but I'm glad I persevered. Because of its low everything – seat, first gear, power (26bhp) and weight (118kg) – it's proving perfect for this job. Admittedly the 250cc single is a pig to kick-start when hot, but I'm sure I'll work that out. The main thing is it can tramp along at 60mph when we occasionally have to go on A-roads, while being idiot-proof off-road.

Rupe has followed a similar, but more exotic path with his Morini – the 250cc V-twin is just a bit faster, longer and heavier. In fact, where is Rupe?

A couple of bikes pass and I begin to worry. There were several points on the section that could have caused a crash, but surely no other bikes would have been allowed past? Then another rider pulls alongside. 'Are you waiting for a bloke on a Morini?' he asks. Yeeeees… 'It's fucked. He couldn't get first gear. I think he's gone home.' And off he rides.

Gone home? My 2am brain finally realises this is unlikely given Rupe lives 250 miles away and is on a shagged Morini. I try to ring but of course there's no reception. I press on alone. Turns out Rupe and the Morini limped to his sister's place nearby.

The next three hours are a blur. The results show I cleaned a few sections but all I remember is the constant, all-consuming concentration required to ride and navigate through the night, never letting myself relax because that's when you miss a tiny trail spearing off to the left or right. The riding rhythm is hypnotic, your brain working so hard to process all the visual

What you'll need

» Tools

You need enough to adjust the chain (mud and miles are killers), swap a spark plug and tighten loose things. Some riders take spare inner tubes, but I just took some tyre slime and an electric pump.

» Bar muffs

The temperature can plummet by 4am so you need these or heated grips. Getting properly cold isn't the problem you might think though because every section warms you up.

» Food and drink

My recommendations are peanuts and coffee. Sweets are a nightmare because they cause a sugar rush then a crash, possibly literally. You could do without anything – there are plenty of food stops on the route.

» Headlight

A top-quality LED bulb from lighting expert Paul Goff (norbsa02.freeuk.com/goffyleds.htm) is what you need. Mine cost £48 – there are plenty cheaper, but if it fails, you're out.

» Road book holder

I bodged one for the Edinburgh Trial then went straight out and bought a proper one. You really don't want unnecessary hassle. My F2R RB801 is backlit, waterproof and easy to turn, and cost £105. Visit f2r.pt

Light bike, tail pack full of peanuts, LED bulb. Job's a good 'un

Team Berk, from left: Adam Smallman, Rupert Paul, John Westlake and Rupert Farnsworth

Rupe Farnsworth finishes on his Suzuki DR-Z400 and awaits emergency beer delivery

Adam and his XT, two hours from the finish
XT
YAMAHA
ENDURO
500

Smug Smallman

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101st LAND'S END TRIAL
18th & 19th April 2025
FINISHERS CERTIFICATE

Wanky Westlake

1.3 km R, DP Withiel
0.8 km L no DP (by small garage) into track
R at tarred road, no DP
SO at X (no DP in our direction)
4.5 km L at T, DP Tregonetha B3274
0.5 km R into lane DP Tregatillian
Bear L at grass triangle DP Tregatillian

The trails between the sections are ace (once it's light and stopped raining)

information that time stops and you exist in a mesmeric bubble of pure concentration. I've no idea if I've been riding for 20 minutes or two hours. I see no other riders.

Then, suddenly, there are lots, all parked near a domestic garage doubling as a soup kitchen. Jovial ladies hand out coffees and bacon baps as we all chat in whispers so as not to annoy the locals. Or bore them. I see another member of our group – Adam – who had set off before Rupe and I, and we head off together, taking it in turns to navigate to give our brains a break.

In my rose-tinted plan, dawn would be a pivotal moment. I'd be riding along a coastal trail as the sun rises and marvel as its golden beams strafe the landscape. It would be one of those motorcycling moments I'd cherish forever. Instead, the drizzle stops for a bit and then it's light. Oh well.

But you know what? I'm enjoying myself. Getting through the night feels like an achievement and the DR makes the daylight sections fun rather than nerve-racking. Of course, some are too difficult for my mediocre skills, but there's never a question of not making it to the top. If all else fails I just sit down and paddle like a numpty. Adam is on a high too – his ancient XT500 is running perfectly and he's only head-butted the scenery once.

And so we come to the final section, Blue Hills. Under normal circumstances this would be a doddle. Although it's steep and has a couple of tight turns, it's dry and rocky and is nothing compared to what's gone before. But two factors conspire to make it tricky. Firstly, we haven't slept for 36 hours and can barely string a sentence together, never mind plot a sensible route up a hill. And secondly, hundreds of spectators are gawping at our every move. Half of Cornwall has come out to see a collection of fatigued older gentlemen (mostly; there are a few ladies) ride up a path.

Ten minutes later we're both on our way to the finish point in Redruth. It wasn't pretty, but the spectators were denied the massive prang they'd hoped for. We collect our finisher's certificates and sink beers, slapping other competitors on the back, shaking hands with complete strangers and generally being deliriously happy. The feeling is an intoxicating mix of elation, pride, satisfaction and relief, and I've never known anything like it. Like a lot of motorcycle sport, long-distance trials are understandably regarded as stupid things to do. But like a lot of motorcycle sport, they're also utterly brilliant. **Bike**

Could you do it?

Probably. If you get a light dirt bike – a Yamaha XT225 Serow, Beta Alp or Honda CRF250/300 would be perfect – and have some trail riding experience, you'll be fine. You won't win, but you'll finish. None of our crew are accomplished off-road riders but the only non-finish was a mechanical. The key thing is not to try it on a heavy bike – anything over 150kg is going to require some proper trials or enduro skills.

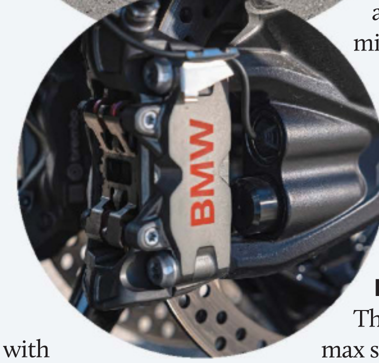
You have three long-distance trials to choose from. The Land's End is in April, the Edinburgh is in September (it's in the Peaks, not Edinburgh) and the Exeter is in January (ie, fricking cold and therefore hardcore).

To enter from scratch is a faff. First you go on the Auto Cycle Union (the UK motorcycle sport authority) website to join up, then become a member of your local trials club. Then you need to join The Motor Cycling Club, which runs the long-distance trials, and enter one of the events. It's an hour or an evening in front of a laptop depending on your web savvy. More info: themotorcyclingclub.org.uk

Can a sports tourer go too far?

Is the new **BMW R1300RS SE ASA** too sporty and clever for its own good?

By **Simon Hargreaves** Photography **James Archibald**



Top: smaller, faster and festooned with gadgets. Above: gadgets mean these do some of the work

Brilliant. Just as some of us are getting older and calming down a bit, here's BMW with a sports tourer they say 'offers an even sportier riding experience than its predecessor'. All we wanted was more tank range and a comfier seat.

But the new R1300RS is a step up in spec over the 1250, with more performance from the same 1300cc flat twin in the R1300GS, RT and naked R, sportier ergonomics, and new optional gadgets like radar-assisted cruise control, semi-automatic transmission and improved semi-active suspension thanks to the world's first variable spring rate. But does more sportiness and technology make the new RS a better sports tourer?

Our bike is the SE ASA Triple Black model with Comfort (heated grips and seat) and Dynamic (semi-active suspension, extra rider modes) packs as standard, costing £17,445. But with extras such as the Touring pack (pannier brackets, but no panniers) plus items such as an Akrapovic can and raised clip-ons, total price is a salty £20,785.

So, BMW say they've made the RS more sporty?

They do – and it is. The 1300 is 2kg heavier than the 1250, but mass is centralised around an engine tilted lower and further forward – so the 1300 feels, between the knees, slimmer and less bulky. It's also more compact: shorter, narrower, less wheelbase.

The riding position is more aggressive – lower bars load wrists and forearms at lower speed, and even BMW's £155 raised clip-ons feel more forward-biased than the 1250. The seat is flatter and thinner, and although BMW claim seat height is 5mm lower, the bit the rider sits on is higher than the 1250. The 1300's two-way manually adjusted screen is also lower, so overall it's more sports than tourer.

The 1300 doesn't steer quicker – a 190/55 rear wheel (1250 is 180/55) and longer trail maintain stability. But the sportier riding position and front-biased weight balance give the new RS a more committed default riding mode.

Is it any good at touring, though?

No question the RS is less predisposed to distance. Besides sportier ergonomics, its 17-litre tank is a litre less than the 1250. BMW say the 1300 has the same consumption as the 1250; we measured 43mpg for a 160 miles-to-empty range, with reserve at 130 miles.

Not to say you can't do big miles on the new RS. Besides preposterous acceleration in any gear and speed, the 143bhp ShiftCam boxer is also long-geared in top; 70mph is a mere 3600rpm. It's the smoothest, most relaxed BMW flat twin ever for motorway work.

But what about all the new tech?

The RS has optional radar-assisted cruise – set your max speed and it'll auto-accelerate and decelerate. BMW's collision avoidance system flashes a dash warning and brakes if it detects a slower or stationary vehicle. But it's prone to overreact when filtering with, er, 'aplomb'. You can just turn it off and pay attention.

BMW's ASA automatic transmission is included with the Dynamic package – servos handle clutch and gear changes based on algorithms of bike status and rider behaviour. There's no clutch lever, and the gear lever is an electronic switch. In Auto, the bike is twist and go – click the RS into first gear and open the throttle. Changes are smooth and happen roughly when you want. But it's still an approximation, not your choice. Manual is better, using the lever to change gear.

The RS cannot stall in either mode, and low-speed auto clutch management is excellent. But full-lock U-turns and snail-pace crawling still need brakes to manage smoothly. I don't see the point – you wouldn't automate a guitar solo, so why automate riding? But if you must, BMW's system is closest to the joy of tap-dancing on a gearbox.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £17,445 **Engine** 1300cc DOHC flat twin **Power** 143bhp **Torque** 110 lb.ft **Top speed** 140mph (est) **Rake/trail** 28°/122.5mm **Wheelbase** 1517mm **Kerb weight** 245kg **Tank size** 17 litres **Economy** 43mpg (tested) **Seat height** 815mm **Colours** Blackstorm, Racing Blue, Motorsports **Availability** in showrooms

***Bike* verdict** More aggressive and more dynamic, with an even more astonishing motor and uncanny roadholding – the R1300RS is exactly what BMW say it is. But despite a raft of technology, it's inevitably tipped the scales away from touring.

***Bike* rating 8/10**

‘Despite a raft of tech, it’s inevitably tipped the scales away from touring’

Makes light work of straight bits, but it’s better suited to roads like this

New XDiavel V4 marches across France

A case of mistaken identity

Ducati's new **XDiavel V4** is a machine that defies labels. We rumble along the fabulous Route Napoléon in search of what this imposing device is really all about

By **Chris Cope** Photography **Ducati**

Identity is a difficult and sometimes contentious thing. When I lived in Wales, for example, it came up a lot in conversations. 'What does it mean to be Welsh?' people seemed to ask themselves. 'And how can I prove that being Welsh makes me better than the English?'

Ducati's new XDiavel V4 is a motorcycle going through its own identity crisis. Ducati calls the feet-forward machine a cruiser, but… ah… well, there's the contentious bit. They're wrong. Or, at the very least, they're confused. Another Italian of confused identity was Napoleon Bonaparte. So, on a stretch of road in southern France that honours him, I'm spending some time trying to figure out what the XDiavel V4 is and isn't.

'Wait,' I hear you say. 'I know American schools are not the finest, but surely they taught you that Napoleon was French?'

They did. But he was born Napoleone di Buonaparte. In Corsica – an island under French control for only a few months before his birth.

Hitherto, it had been governed by Italian speakers. Napoleon's parents had roots in Tuscany and Lombardy. He didn't properly speak French until he was nine years old; thereafter he spoke with a Corsican accent.

In fairness, though, you find a lot of tributes to him in France. For example: the spectacular Route Napoléon, a scenic ride from the French Riviera to Grenoble. The route loosely follows a famous march that Napoleon undertook in 1815. You'll know from reruns of *Sharpe* that Napoleon had been exiled the year before to the island of Elba. Because people of the time didn't have motorcycles to keep them entertained, they amused themselves by making bad decisions. They exiled a charismatic, self-appointed emperor to a not-far-away island with enough resources to form a 1100-strong fighting force. What could possibly go wrong?

Route Napoléon starts in Golfe-Juan, where Napoleon and his merry men arrived on 1 March 1815. It moves into the southernmost part of the Alps on a zig-zaggy and seemingly directionless course that perhaps reflects Napoleon's desire to avoid confrontation with troops loyal to King Louis XVIII.

The first several miles are largely skippable, rolling through urban and suburban landscapes with patience-testing speed limits (20kph at some points – that's 12mph). Although, it is a setting that provides strong evidence that Ducati either doesn't know or doesn't care what a cruiser is. For the sake of avoiding muddling ourselves, let's collectively agree that cruisers, and the qualities and characteristics of cruisers, are good. You don't have to believe that, but many people do. And if you are going to sell 'a Ducati creation for cruiser lovers' (their words), it makes sense to expect the XDiavel V4 to possess some or all of the qualities and characteristics that make cruisers good. Like the ability to rumble *smoothly* and *easily* through urban and suburban landscapes at low speed.

This is not the XDiavel V4. This bike hates going slow. It hates you for making it go slow. Shuddering and convulsing through rush-hour traffic in Grasse, I am convinced that at any point profanities are going to pop up on the bike's 6.9in TFT screen, cursing me for lack of pace. Rarely have I encountered a motorcycle so ill-suited to cruising.

When I have, it's often been a Ducati. This bike's powerplant is very Ducati: raw, aggressive, eager to pick a fight. And, obviously, the issue isn't actually low speed, it's revs. The engine doesn't want to get out of bed for anything less than 4500rpm.

How we got here

» 2015 Ducati had launched the Diavel in 2011, a hypernaked-cruiser thing with a swollen V-twin and caricature looks. Yet despite its huge rear tyre, the Diavel handled – editor Armitage recalls being on a GSX-R and being thrashed by one (admittedly ridden by James Haydon). Four years later, Ducati show the new XDiavel at EICMA. Driven by a 1262cc Testastretta DVT V-twin engine, it's a more foot-forward and cruiser-like variant promising 'low-speed excitement'. A mood board showing inspiration for the bike contains no cruisers.

» 2016 XDiavel arrives. In our September 2016 issue, Armitage describes it thus: 'Overwhelming engine output and a track-ready chassis while in the body position of an arse-dragging water-skier.' An S version is soon revealed, promising a handful of blingy upgrades.

» 2018 The XDiavel receives a suspension upgrade, improving the experience for rider and passenger – but stays a surprisingly sporty proposition. The pricier S version is offered in some fancy new colours.

A presence to match the route. And Napoleon's army in the day

> ‘Screaming skyward on roads with vistas that inspire jealousy – why can’t I live here?’

» **2021** Ducati unveil the XDiavel Dark and XDiavel Black Star. Apart from minor changes brought on by Euro5 regs, the overall experience is unchanged from previous versions. ‘In truth, the new-found horses aren’t noticed,’ muses Armitage (May 2021 issue).

» **2022** The line-up now consists of the XDiavel Dark, XDiavel S, and XDiavel Nera. The latter is limited to 500 units. In terms of differences from previous versions, the second verse is (pretty much) the same as the first. The XDiavel remains a device unlike anything else.

» **2025** XDiavel V4 launches. Belt final drive has been replaced by a chain, and rather more significantly the V-twin has been replaced by the ‘MotoGP-derived’ V4 Granturismo engine. More tech and less weight than previous generations. Still not a cruiser.

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Awesome pipes made even better by the echo off the Alps

Fortunately, it doesn't have to wait long. Immediately outside Grasse there is a steep hairpin turn. The bike's un-cruiser-like suspension handles it without effort, and we are off, screaming skyward on roads with vistas that inspire jealousy – why can't I live here?

Other testers have observed that it 'goes like stink'. They're not wrong. The XDiavel V4 is so happy when you're on the throttle that you easily find yourself riding at a more spirited pace than intended. Meanwhile, because the bike is long and low (a bit like a cruiser), it plays tricks with your mind. I've ridden a lot of cruisers over the years; I'm familiar with the feel and fight of their weight through corners. Heading into a sharpish left-hander, the Ducati's physical presence mixes in my brain with my speed and I feel a surge of panic. I am convinced I have overcooked it. 'Oh. Hell. I've done a wrong,' my cruiser brain laments, observing that just beyond the curve is a cliff, nothingness, and inevitable doom.

With prayer and purpose, I throw everything into hopefully – somehow – avoiding that cliff. The bike responds by happily dancing through the corner with nimbleness and ease. So much so that I need to re-correct to ensure I stay on the right side of the road. As I power out of the corner, I realise I could have gone in so much faster. Once again: the XDiavel V4 is not a cruiser. Its suspension offers a perfect mix of smoothing out road imperfections and giving confidence in corners.

Not that you want to get too confident. There is 39° of lean angle on each side. In application, though, you have less. The feet-forward riding position means the heel of your boot naturally hangs lower than the peg. Your foot is most likely to kiss the pavement before the bike. Which is a great way to end up with a broken ankle.

Selfie-ready vistas for 'the socials' at every turn on this great route

For the most part, the corners of the Route Napoléon aren't overly technical. Many of them you can roar through in fourth gear, occasionally even fifth. I love this kind of riding: engaging but not mind-melting. I'd be happy to spend all day doing this.

Unfortunately, around Escragnolles, I'm feeling uncomfortable. Ducati say the XDiavel V4's seat is 50 per cent larger than on the previous-generation V-twin XDiavel – and the passenger accommodation is, too. Initially, the seat is comfortable and cosseting. But perhaps too much. You get locked into place. Depending on how much natural padding you bring to the bike, you can start to feel aches and pains in as little as 45 minutes. Thankfully there's good news here as the scenery and small towns of Route Napoléon provide plenty of incentive

Cruiser? Nope. Pretty? Oh yes

Pont de l'Artuby. Not traversed by Napoleon

to stop. Escragnolles, for example, has a very nice public water fountain and a large mural dedicated to hometown hero François Mireur, a 1700s general who is credited not with writing *La Marseillaise* but being quite good at singing it.

At Castellane, a little further down the road, I detour to follow the enticingly azure-green Verdon River as it twists and turns through one of Europe's deepest canyons, Gorges du Verdon. The river is far below me, the road seemingly hanging off the cliff at points. The beauty is other-worldly. According to the internets, people didn't know about this place until the 1780s. I find that highly unlikely. Humans have been stomping around France for tens of thousands of years. How could they possibly have spent most of that time not spotting a massive cut in the earth that is almost half a mile deep? But maybe this is a magic place, somehow invisible to most.

That would explain why they don't appear to care about child labour laws. At a roadside restaurant, I am served by a boy who looks to be about nine years old. He is wearing an Aston Villa top and speaks no English. He offers no menu, but I guess from looking at other diners that lunch is a three-course affair. He is probably too young to have yet formed a solid opinion about Americans, but I do my country no favours with my impatience.

'Is there more food?' I ask after finishing my salad.

'Sweet,' he says, nodding politely.

'No, I don't want anything sweet. Not yet,' I respond. 'I want, you know, *fooooood*.'

He gives a cheery thumbs up and walks off. Almost as soon as he is out of sight it dawns on me the word he used had been '*suite*,' as in '*tout suite*', as in, 'it's on its way, don't worry about it'.

I smack myself on the forehead and decide to do something constructive. Like stare at the XDiavel V4. It really is a sexy bike.

'The bike happily dances through the corner with nimbleness and ease'

It stands out on a showroom floor, but it is absolutely stunning here in the wild, where there's little else like it. The bodywork wraps around its 1158cc liquid-cooled V4 Granturismo engine like shiny, expensive clay. Every curve and line is right. *C'est magnifique*. *Che bello*. I'm particularly fond of the gargantuan four-port exhaust. It looks like the cannon on a Starfighter. If environmental regulations are going to force you to have an exhaust the size of a rubbish bin, why not make it a feature?

I can see the influence of supernakeds in most of its aesthetic. Think the MV Brutale 1000 RR, or the aggressiveness of the KTM 1390 Super Duke, but with softer lines. Ducati probably weren't thinking this, but I also see a nod to American homemade performance culture in the wide rear tyre. It makes me think of Busas and Gixers with extended swingarms and underglow lighting, tearing up the street in impromptu drag races on a summer night. Or, maybe Ducati *are* going for that look. The XDiavel V4's tail lighting has the look of an underglow strip. Whatever the case, outside of the engine, the styling is more 'improved' than 'new'. The XDiavel name has been around since 2016 and what you see here isn't unrecognisable from what Ducati produced almost a decade ago. Those previous versions didn't look like cruisers, either.

It's pretty, but it's not perfect (and not just because head-on it looks, to me, a bit like a scooter). Like every Ducati, it needs to spend time warming up if you want to avoid stalling. Water pools in the seat even in light rain. The massive air filter is mostly exposed, making it susceptible to bugs, rocks, and wet weather. The oil filter is so deftly hidden that you will almost certainly need to pay someone to find it. And heated grips do not come standard on this £25,995 motorcycle.

For the most part, though, this bike's biggest problem is its marketing. It doesn't look like a cruiser, doesn't handle like a cruiser, and doesn't cruise like a cruiser. If you want a cruiser, you will almost certainly hate this motorcycle. I can't help feeling that it exists only because someone, somewhere, observed how much cruiser riders are willing to spend and thought Ducati could cash in by offering a single concession (riding position) to a segment of riders. That's cynical and almost insulting.

When you ride the bike, however, it's easy to forgive. Whatever the hell the XDiavel V4 actually is, it's definitely fun. Especially on roads like this. To that end, I wonder how much use this bike would get in the UK. You need the drier weather of south-east England and the open roads of Wales or Scotland without the challenge of travelling between them. I suppose if this bike tickles your fancy, you'll find a way to make it work.

Further up Route Napoléon, Laffrey is home to one of the most famous moments in Napoleon's return: when he stared down the army that had been sent to stop him. 'Soldiers of the Fifth regiment, do you recognise me?' asks Joaquin Phoenix's Bonaparte in the 2023 film *Napoleon*. 'I miss you. I'm melancholy for my home… I want to come home.'

History suggests he only said the first part of that quote. But the latter part is a sentiment I can relate to. With aching back and hips, I am melancholy for the hotel bar.

Why rush to Waterloo when you can enjoy this? It was the Hundred Days for a reason...

> ‘Whatever the hell the XDiavel V4 actually is, it’s definitely fun. Especially on roads like this’

Who the hell are Zontes?

And is their £7199 **ZT703-F** worth considering? We go for a spin…

By **Jon Urry** Photography **Adam Shorrock**

Top: a lot of metal for seven grand. Above: 'Athletic' dash not for you? Try 'City', 'Wild' or 'Casual' instead

Another month, another Chinese bike that looks like it could be a stoating bargain. But before we get to that, let's tackle a more fundamental question: who are Zontes?

Well, they're owned by the Guangdong Tayo Motorcycle Technology Company, a Chinese manufacturer that's been knocking out mini cars and sub-300cc bikes for more than 20 years. Zontes is the firm's European motorcycle brand.

Last year they announced their entry into the middleweight market with a range of bikes powered by an all-new 699cc triple – the first of which is this, the ZT703-F. A sportsbike is following very soon, too.

With a price of £6999 (plus on the road costs), a three-pot motor that makes it unique in the sub-100bhp adventure world, a hefty spec sheet and plenty of dealers, it looks promising. But is it?

Who have they copied the engine from?

No one. Not directly, anyway. The 699cc triple is designed and built by Zontes. Unlike many Chinese rivals such as Voge (who use BMW's F-Series engine in their DS900X) and CFMoto and Kove (who use a version of KTM's parallel twin), Zontes are forging their own path with the ZT703 series.

Saying that, there's nothing special or unique about the motor, and they'll have no doubt scrutinised Triumph and Yamaha's triples. The F is detuned to 94bhp to allow it to be made A2-legal; the imminent RR sportsbike will apparently make 110bhp.

So, how much kit do you get?

Your £6999 gets you fully adjustable suspension, ABS and traction control (not lean-sensitive), a quickshifter (upshift only), heated grips, keyless ignition (and tank and seat), phone connectivity, tyre pressure monitors, electrically adjustable screen, centrestand, USB charging points, hand guards, and front and rear-facing cameras that can record both images and video.

Spend an extra £999 and you can add three-piece aluminium luggage, crash bars and fog lights.

What's the catch? How safe is my money?

The Zontes has a two-year warranty and the firm is fairly well-established in the UK thanks to its smaller-capacity model range with 65 dealers, most of which are signed up to the big bikes.

While this is reassuring, depreciation is likely to be high. On PCP the final payment is £3230 – 46 per cent of its initial value. Mainstream alternatives tend to depreciate less with final payments of around 55-60 per cent of their value. It's also worth noting it has low 3000-mile service intervals (although valve clearances are a respectable 25,000 miles).

Does it feel cheap to ride?

No. It's a physically large bike and it is hard not to be impressed by its spec. If you are looking at churning out miles, it has lots of practical points and a comfortable riding position.

However, there are annoyances. The higher of the two screens available creates a lot of unpleasant wind noise and while the motor is pleasingly perky with a good gearbox, it's a bit vibey at higher revs and the traction control is quite keen to get involved. The initial throttle response is frustratingly jerky (in both power modes) in town, too. Overall, the engine feels lacking in refinement.

But the chassis is impressive. With fully adjustable Marzocchi suspension and Michelin Anakee tyres, it handles really well and is quick to turn despite its 21in front wheel. But the J.Juan brakes have a nasty spongy feel as well as a latency in their bite.

How does it compare to the mainstream competition?

Ridden in isolation, it's fine. But ride it back to back with a mainstream alternative and you can tell it's in its development infancy – it feels less honed in all respects except for its handling, which is excellent.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £7199 **Engine** 699cc DOHC 12v inline triple **Power** 94bhp **Torque** 56 lb.ft **Top speed** 110mph (estimated) **Rake/trail** n/a **Wheelbase** 1565mm **Kerb weight** 236kg **Seat height** 845mm **Tank size** 22 litres **Economy** 48mpg (tested) **Colours** Silver/blue, black/silver **Availability** Now

***Bike* verdict** The ZT703 is a promising start and has an impressive array of both electronic gadgets and equipment for your money, but it doesn't feel like the finished article yet. A bit more development in the fuelling, electronics and brakes is required, but it's not far off the mark.

***Bike* rating 6/10**

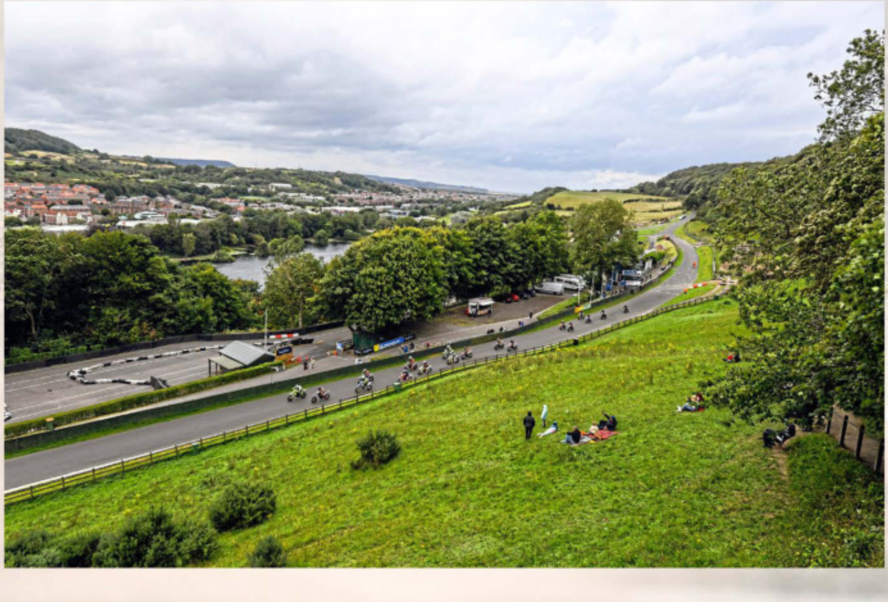
‘You can tell it’s in its development infancy – it feels less honed’

Face remind anyone else of a Transformer?

[Inside] Supermoto

Part road, part motocross. Utterly thrilling. *Bike* goes behind the scenes of the bizarre but brilliant British Supermoto Championship

Words and photography **Greg Moss**



Oliver's, but not as you know it

» Legendary track Oliver's Mount in Scarborough, North Yorkshire. For the British Supermoto Championship the track is modified, with jumps, off-road sections and seriously tight twisting chicanes. On paper it's a strange combination of bikes, riding styles and track conditions – but it makes for some engrossing racing.

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Slipping 'n' sliding

Alex Mullaney, 17, slides into the main straight on his Italian-built TM 450 SMK – the 449cc, 115kg bike model that's won multiple World Supermoto titles. Despite his age Mullaney is one of the quickest riders. 'I won the academy championship in my second year, then I won it in 2019. Now I'm under-21 British Supermoto champion.' Mullaney sees it as a stepping stone into the world of road racing. 'It's a good introduction,' he says. 'There are a few lads who I know like Davey Todd and Christian Iddon who started here. I'm starting to get into the road bikes as well, see where that takes me – hopefully I'll get into BSB or something like that.'

Doesn't break the bank

Affordable and low maintenance – that's a big part of Supermoto's appeal. 'You can buy a bike off the shelf and come racing. It's an easy sport to get into,' says competitor Oliver Holmes. 'You don't need the fancy wheels, fancy tyres, fancy bike; you can just buy a stock bike and race. You can start on a motocross bike. KTM and Husqvarna, TM and GasGas are the ones that will do a Supermoto-type bike [from new] – at least that way you save on having to buy wheels, getting the suspension shortened, so on. Out of the box they're quick bikes.'

Won a fair few

'I've got 18 British championships' says Chris Hodgson. 'I've travelled the world doing it – I've raced in Australia, Asia, done a season in America and then the world championships in Europe. It's given me a good life,' says the 36-year-old. 'It is really good for bike control. Just imagine: we're on slick tyres, then you're coming onto tarmac with shit all over the tyres – it's gonna move about. You just let it happen – once you've got that control, you've cracked it. Imagine going into a corner with your bike at 90° – you've made part of the corner already. You're not riding round it, your bike's made part of the corner.'

> 'Buy a bike, come racing. It's an easy sport to get into'

Serving their purpose

Crash bobbins, footpeg sliders and handguards are essential bits of kit. 'The beauty of these bikes is when you fall off them, 90 per cent of the time you're just smacking the handguards,' says TM rider Chris Hodgson. 'It's not like you've sent a £30,000 Fireblade into the gravel trap and you're sat on your knees crying.'

Following father's footsteps

'It's so unique as a sport,' says Jess Mitchell, who competes with her 350cc KTM. 'It's completely different to motocross and road racing – you get the road and the dirt. The paddock is so friendly, it's a lovely atmosphere. I've been doing Supermoto from 11 years old. It's a family thing – my dad does it, my uncle races and then me.'

‘Second gear, hit it full throttle. I love doing that jump’

Loving the high life

Tripz.UK team rider Jay Smith leaps off the biggest jump at Oliver’s Mount. Rider Alex Mullaney admits it’s a highlight of the track. ‘I like doing that jump,’ he says. ‘Second gear, hit it full throttle, I love it. In qualifying I dented my rim [from landing the jump] so I had to fit a new one.’ While the top speeds in Supermoto are relatively low compared to road racing, it’s still fraught with risks. ‘I’ve broken my left wrist three times and I’ve done the right one once, from hitting the deck,’ adds Mullaney. ‘Knocked myself out a few times. I’ve had big crashes but I’ve always managed to get back up.’ Oliver Holmes is also a fan of the jumps in Supermoto. ‘You just hit it as hard as you can, and send it. You tend to land rear first and try to ride it out, keep it going. I’ve had a few where you panic mid-air. You can move the bike in the air, rev to put the back end down, and rear brake to put the back end up – that’s from motocross’.

‘I love Supermoto – I always have done since the first day I tried it. My one true passion’

Passion leads to glory

Jay Smith leads Chris Hodgson into the chicane. Smith is a veteran of the sport, having raced for 20 years. ‘I love Supermoto,’ he says. ‘I always have done since the first day I tried it. I use motocross to keep my bike fitness up but Supermoto is my one true passion. I’ve never won the British championship, I’ve always come second. So this year I’m trying to adopt a different mindset – not “win it or bin it” – I need to get good solid points’. Smith’s tactic clearly worked – since being photographed he claimed the British championship, beating Hodgson by eight points. ‘I am 42 now so it’s taking its toll on the body. It is quite a physical track – lots of stop, start, off-road. It’s quite mental because there’s so many tricky bits, you don’t want to tuck the front or lose the rear. I’ll be glad when today’s over – Monday and Tuesday I’ll be a bit sore.’

Great place to start

‘Supermoto is a good grounding sport for people coming through to road racing,’ says mechanic Ian Collins. ‘They learn how to set a bike up properly because you can’t set up a Supermoto bike properly. There’s too much variation in terrain – there’s tarmac, dirt, gravel. You’ll always be suffering in a certain area, so we try to set it as best we can to do most of the track without giving the rider any drama.’

Slick tyres... on dirt

'You ride slicks' says Oliver Holmes. 'You've just got to accept it's going to move around on the dirt. A set is £400. I'll put on a set for the Saturday and a set for the Sunday. I'll put a set on for qualifying, then at lunchtime turn them round, then second and third round turn them round again so they get even wear. Sunday I'll do the same thing. I use warmers, to get them as hot as you can. If you've got warm tyres you know you've got grip'.

Hand-built for the job

'It's a proper supermoto-specific bike. It's absolutely brilliant,' says Chris Hodgson, referring to his TM. 'They're completely hand-built. You buy them for £13,000 and you can spec them from the factory'. Like virtually all the bikes in the paddock, his bike is a single-cylinder 450cc four-stroke. 'A couple of guys go with two-strokes but I think the four-strokes have advanced that much over the past few years that you can't really go past them now.'

Work hard, play hard

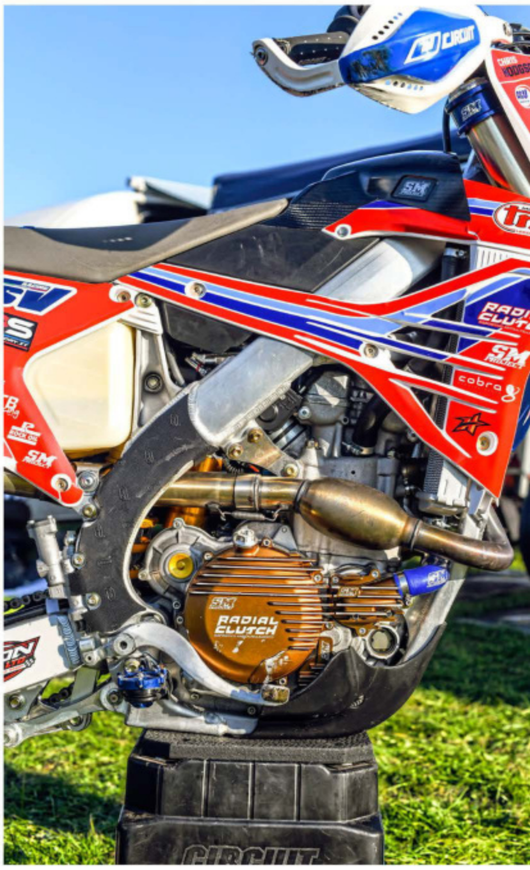
'It's an old one this, a 2018 KTM 450,' says Blaine Pearson. 'I've put a six-speed gearbox in it, 320mm disc, Brembo caliper and master cylinder, full carbon exhaust, everything's titanium... I bought this off Alex Mullaney, one of the top lads. He spends all the money then I buy it off his dad cheap! I still get nervous on the start, you could have 35 people going into a hairpin. You still get nervous but you work all week, do all the overtime just to come here for a weekend.'

Too hot to handle

Mechanic Dan Hunter checks the tyre pressure on one of team Tripz.UK's bikes. Ian Collins, mechanic for Jay Smith, explains why it's so important to use tyre warmers. 'I run 28psi in the rear and 30/31psi in the front. All the tyre warmers are set at 85°C. 60bhp on tarmac is not a massive amount compared to British Superbikes, but once the tyre goes onto grass, gravel or dirt it loses temperature. And then you're back on the tarmac so you've got to generate heat.'

He's the top dog

The Tripz.UK team dog, Bubba, named after Supercross legend James 'Bubba' Stewart. The paddock atmosphere is as laid-back as possible – everyone knows everyone. 'It's a good laugh,' says rider Blaine Pearson. 'We have a few beers at night, have a fire, a party, then next day go race our bikes. You can battle hard and barge each other but you come back and shake hands and everything is alright.'



Go there...

Looking for somewhere to go over the August Bank Holiday weekend? Why not head to Oliver's Mount for this year's round? A single-day ticket is £15, or for both days it's £25. Camping options, too. More info at oliversmount.ticketco.events

Is it third time lucky?

Buell return with new owner and updated models including this **Hammerhead 1190**

By **Jon Urry** Photography **James Archibald**

With their rim-mounted single front disc, frame that doubles as a fuel tank and, er, unique looks, there's no mistaking a Buell. The company that started in 1983 making naked bikes powered by Harley-Davidson's Sportster engines but then, under Harley's ownership, diversified into sportsbikes with a liquid-cooled V-twin have always forged their own design path.

But reliability issues and changes of ownership have made for a perilous existence. Now, with yet another hand at the helm, Buell Motorcycles are back and the first of a new range have landed in the UK – a £23,720 1190SX naked and this £24,670 Hammerhead 1190 sportsbike. Third time lucky?

Is founder Erik Buell still involved?

No. Erik's last dealings with the company came when he formed Erik Buell Racing (EBR) out of the ashes of Buell Motorcycles, following Harley's decision to pull out in 2009. EBR made a limited volume of road and race bikes until it was dissolved in 2015. Erik's involvement stopped then.

So, who owns it now?

US firm Liquid Asset Partners. They bought the rights to the Buell name along with the assets, tooling and designs owned by EBR. Liquid Asset Partners is headed by Bill Melvin, a bike nut who isn't short of a bob or two. He's has made it his mission to inject new life into Buell and has set up a production facility in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Are they just tarted-up EBR 1190s?

Yes and no. The new bikes use the same chassis and engine designs as the EBR models, but the components are largely made by the new firm and there have been a few small updates to engine internals and the electronics. The styling is basically unaltered. They aren't 'new models' as such, more a reworking.

Top: Euro5+ should be a breeze. When it gets ABS... Above: Showa shock is fully adjustable

SPECIFICATIONS

Price £24,670 **Engine** 1190cc 8v DOHC 72° V-twin **Power** 182bhp **Torque** 102 lb.ft **Top speed** 150mph (estimated) **Rake/trail** 22.4°/96.5mm **Wheelbase** n/a **Kerb weight** 188kg (dry) **Seat height** 826mm **Tank size** 17 litres **Economy** 42mpg (estimated) **Colours** clear-coated (paint options extra) **Availability** Now

***Bike* verdict** The Hammerhead 1190 and 1190SX will only really appeal to Buell enthusiasts. And while they ride well, both are based on a 10-year-old design – and that makes it difficult to justify the price tag.

***Bike* rating 6/10**

That engine was designed 20 years ago. Surely it's now too long in the tooth?

Yes but... It makes a claimed 182bhp with 102 lb.ft of torque, and while the V-twin feels like an old-school engine with a lumpy and analogue vibe, the throttle connection is surprisingly subtle. Despite its claimed power, its performance won't leave you weak at the knees but arguably this isn't an issue as enthusiasts will probably prioritise its authentic Buell attitude rather than its peak power. And while it has 20-level traction control there's no ABS – so each bike needs MSVA approval.

What's MSVA approval?

The rim-mounted disc makes fitting ABS tricky, so every Buell needs Motorcycle Single Vehicle Approval by the DVLA to check it's safe, as they can't meet Euro5+ regs without ABS. Buell are working on a new twin-disc version that will have ABS, to be sold alongside a 'heritage' model that retains the rim-mounted disc. Until then, no European country can road-register a Buell as only the UK allows MSVA approval.

Is there still a place for Buell's wacky design?

We think so. Does it work? The SX is a fine-handling bike that's a step above an average roadster but isn't at the level of an M1000R, Streetfighter V4 or even a Hornet 1000 SP. And it has a few issues, including a very limited steering lock and no sidestand cut-out switch, which is downright dangerous.

Will it be reliable?

Perhaps – it's not exactly an untried motor, after all. Rainbow Moto, who are the UK importers, are offering a three-year warranty with each bike and they have access to a full range of spares.

What's left to come?

The SX and Hammerhead will be followed up by an all-new Super Cruiser, which uses the same engine in a trellis chassis, and then a Super Touring model.

Clear-coated carbon fibre is standard. Paint (any colour you like) is extra

> ‘Enthusiasts will probably prioritise authentic Buell attitude over peak power’

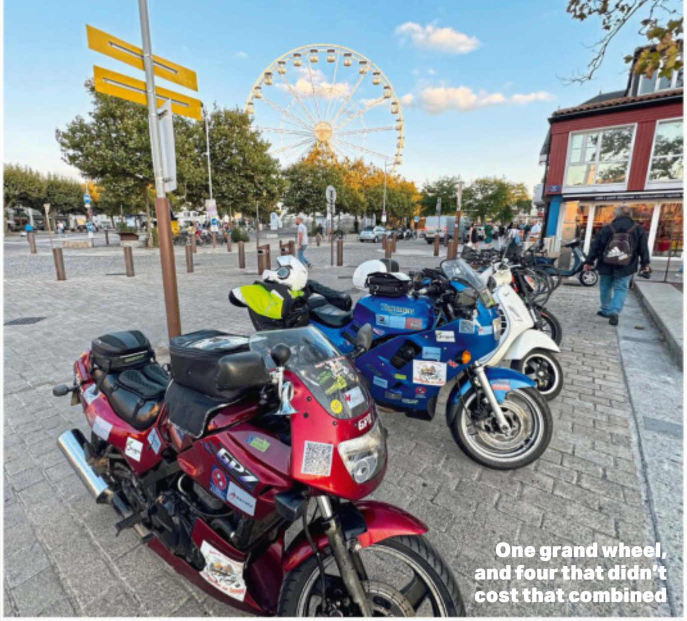
Karaoke, prog rock and cheap bikes

The perfect mount for a point-hunting challenge to Barcelona is, surely, a £435 Triumph Trophy. Alistair George goes rallying on a budget…

Words and Photography **Alistair George**

‘We eventually get a camp bed out to sleep in the entrance to some toilets’

Barcelona or bust? Who cares – it's all about the experience



One grand wheel, and four that didn't cost that combined

Passing prog rock enthusiast just out of shot

Accessory spots as effective like this as when on

Pete, Alistair and their mighty motorcycles

This is not what they describe as 'glamping'

Often fuelled by Guinness, The Voice has got me into some incredible situations over the years. A few years ago, it said: 'Why don't we float a bath down a canal for 10 miles, pulled along the towpath with a pantomime horse?' Which we did. This time it pipes up when we're looking at images of dramatic scenery, dodgy cars and the happy faces of chaps in lay-bys covered in oil, from the previous year's SkinFlint Rally. 'We should do this on bikes,' it says.

The owner of The Voice is Alan, who has organised the SkinFlint Rally since 2018. Principally, the rules are to acquire a vehicle for less than £500 and get to that year's destination – in our case, Barcelona. The less spent, the better. Points are awarded for being under £500 and completing challenges along the way, such as taking a photo of a gendarme holding a baguette or getting a SkinFlint tattoo (which two people did to get the points the year before). The more warning lights the vehicle has illuminated the better, too. But points are deducted for overspending, using toll roads, and spending your way out of trouble.

Until we tried it, no one had attempted the rally on two wheels – probably for good reason – but there was nothing in the rules that said we couldn't. Obviously that meant we must. It's all in the name of your chosen charity, so we decided to support a local hospice.

All over the floor

After hours on eBay searching for a steed under £500, I put an early bid on a 1992 Triumph Trophy. This early low bid tactic had been fruitful in the past, although I expected a competing bid… until I started to look closer at the pictures. I 'won' the

This perfectly captures the feel of the SkinFlint

Spot of bucket-waving pre-ride fundraising

Pete and GPZ, rattling in France somewhere

Who really needs luxury hotels and fine dining?

Triumph for £435. It had sat in a garden for five years, but thankfully the reason for a single silencer rather than the standard pair was someone changing the system, not that half the pipes were missing as I'd assumed. I was helpfully told the tyres were only flat at the bottom.

While there's a limit on the vehicle price, you can spend what's needed to make it safe and legal and pass an MOT. A few evenings and weekends of fun ensued. After purchasing a battery and harvesting significant quantities of cheese from the carburettors, the bike fired and ran badly – but lots of carb fettling sorted that. The stuck clutch was a worry, but once warm everything loosened up. Fitted with new tyres, the Triumph was taken for an MOT and passed with a couple of advisories: 'misting' on the fork legs, and a minor coolant leak that I hadn't noticed.

Given the plan was a long ride in warm weather, I decided to change the radiator ('lightly used' for £12) and headed into the garage to find the rear shock had emptied itself onto the floor. The cheapest replacement on eBay was £30. It looked grotty but performed surprisingly well.

I did a few successful trips to local shows to try to raise funds and awareness, including the Triumph factory's monthly bike night. Here I met a lovely guy who thought he'd most likely packed my bike when it originally left the factory, and on hearing my plan he keenly informed me the weakest component on my bike was probably the rider. Strangely reassuring.

At this point my friend Pete bought his own well-worn 'project' to join me. Initially he was smug as his Kawasaki GPZ500S still had an MOT and could be ridden the 150 miles home, although the speedo stopped halfway back and most of the fairing was held on by hope. Then he noticed the crack through 90 per cent of the top yoke, and then there were the electrics… When Pete sent me a video of the bike running it sounded like he'd left his spanners in the crankcases. But he persevered, stripping the little GPZ and fixing any wiring bodges he stumbled across along the way. He replaced the cracked yoke, too. In the end, it was running fine, though he somehow missed the fact the fork seals were in a worse state than mine. More of that later.

Next we recruited our chum Nick who would follow behind in a van packed with duct tape, WD-40 and zip ties. We booked our Channel crossing and, brimful of wishful thinking, somewhere to stay in La Rochelle and a campsite in Toulouse. We thought it wasn't much to lose if we didn't get to either.

Karaoke kick-start

Then one Wednesday evening we loaded the bikes into the van and set off for Folkestone. Yes, the van. We were fully prepared to break down, but we were keen for it to be on the other side of the Channel. The SkinFlint officially starts when vehicles hit France, so at least we might get starting points. However, we were also aware of the extra paperwork when taking a bike across the Channel in a van – so in Ashford we unloaded, fuelled up and set off on the first part of our journey to Folkestone for the night.

The wait at the Channel Tunnel terminal let us meet many of the participants for the first time. What a bunch of lunatics – and I say that in the most complimentary way. Here was a group of people all hoping to make it to Barcelona in machines that frankly I wouldn't trust to get to the local Asda. In previous years many vehicles have met their demise in foreign scrap yards – and looking round, I was certain a significant proportion of those in view would go the same way.

Our plan was to ride along with another entry we knew in a bright pink Chrysler PT Cruiser, but street cred got the better of us and we soon split up. Lunch in Le Mans felt like a long way away, but the miles disappeared as the sun rose on a glorious day. The bikes were both running well, with Pete looking like an adult riding a child's bicycle on the GPZ – my mirrors were filled with knees and elbows. The Trophy felt a bit cramped compared to my normal Bonneville but nothing like the GPZ. Pete's knees are almost as likely to conk out as his electrics.

A couple of hours of cruising through quaint villages with smells of fresh bread and coffee was too much and a breakfast stop was agreed. A more stereotypical roadside French café you could not find and the omelettes were delicious.

Le Mans was our first official waypoint. We pulled into the car park overlooking the circuit entrance and ate biscuits. By no means the last to arrive, but we were one of the first to leave having realised we had to be in La Rochelle by 6pm to meet our Airbnb host. The booking confirmation had been very strict. Must. Not. Be. Late. Our accommodation was a yacht in the marina, which sounds glamorous but was the cheapest available for three people. So off we went, trying to do the photo challenges but struggling – the cars had it easier because their passengers had nothing else to do except look out for weird churches, willing gendarmes and whatever.

We rode into La Rochelle with low sun across the water and minutes to spare. I'm not sure if it's a nightly occurrence, but we were treated to several drive-bys from an old chap in a vintage motorhome with speakers blaring. Although encouraged away from the area a couple of times by the local copper, he always returned with a big grin, wild hair and some prog rock. Odd.

Keep on running

Rather than the quick route to Toulouse, we'd take the scenic option through national parks. This trip was about the journey for us, not the destinations.

But my trusty Triumph was dead come morning. Luckily I'd brought a jump pack – and with that attached all was good. Sort of… it was soon clear only two cylinders were firing. I figured this was sufficient for a few hundred miles of riding, but ten miles in and the third cylinder kicked into life.

Through the morning it felt like we crossed every river in France, each varying in width and each stunningly beautiful, sun dancing across the water. The rest of the day was spent in forests – the smell was incredible. We also had our first taste of rain, but as quick as it came, it passed.

The ride into Toulouse was dual carriageways, and the bigger city was a chance to try my upgraded headlight. The new LED bulb was a massive improvement

‘Long straight roads, with mountains getting ever closer. The scenery was breathtaking’

Sunny France, dicing with a taxi-cum-time machine… Obviously

Only so long you can ogle a gaudy pink Chrysler

ROUNDTABLE

Things you never thought you'd see, #47

Artisan Boulanger Pâtissier
Isabelle & Eric
Chez Pellon

The smell gets the better of you in the end

Deep down he's desperate to do a lap or three

ZOE'S PLACE
MF08 HTJ

A finer selection of nails than the local roofer

on the original, but my 'touring' light – £15 on eBay – produced just two white spots rather than wayfinding assistance.

Pete had booked the campsite. The electric security gates and watchtower were disconcerting, and the gentleman who 'greeted' us wasn't sure they had room despite showing him our booking. Our protestations were met with multiple shrugs, but in return for his passport Pete seemed to achieve a pitch and we were given a map with a vague indication of where to go. Then we realised we'd need Pete's passport for our planned 7am departure but the chap was nowhere to be found.

The on-site restaurant closed as we walked in, the chef removing his apron when he heard the door open. Biscuits for dinner, then. This facility was also the site bar, and in the corner were the only other campers we saw despite hundreds of caravans, motorhomes and tents. Fortunately the site was happy to serve beer and before long the bar attracted what we think were the family of the manager. At some point, Pete's passport reappeared.

The next day's ride delivered long straight roads, with mountains getting ever closer. The scenery was breathtaking. Our checkpoint was Andorra, and the mountain roads, hairpin corners and sound of the bikes reverberating through the hills will stay with me forever.

So will the meeting point in a remote car park, with all the teams together in one place. And to have got this far on a £435 bike felt like an achievement. The Triumph had taken all the twists and turns in its stride, although it was still over-fuelling; likely a stuck float – we decided it was best to leave well alone at the roadside and just keep going. Apart from diabolical fuel

GPZ
TROPHY S

‘No one had attempted the rally on two wheels – obviously that meant we must’

consumption and a horrendous smell of fuel at every stop, the bike was fantastic while moving. Pete’s GPZ was also functioning satisfactorily, although his leaky fork seals were a liability descending Andorra’s mountains, with the oil dripping down the fork legs onto the brakes. His corner speed was often highly impressive.

A true life experience

Our final leg into Barcelona was uneventful, and after the beautiful and entertaining ride so far, it seemed a bit dull. But we’d done it.

It was at the restaurant that night, buzzing still from our achievement and having devoured burgers, that we decided that rather than heading for the campsite we’d use our energy to start the ride back. Why not? We rode through the night and one of the biggest storms I’ve ever seen, stopping a few times in French service bays and eventually getting a camp bed out for Pete to sleep in the entrance to some toilets. Pete’s kit included a coffee-making jetpack, firing us into life when the sun came up.

I hope to go SkinFlinting again, though I’d probably choose a more laid-back riding position. Despite the Trophy being a sports tourer, I found the pegs quite high and the riding position a little restrictive. Not so restrictive as Pete’s, perhaps – every time I looked in the mirrors his legs were dangling at his side to stretch out his knees.

We could have taken more time for stops, eaten proper food and stayed in hotels rather than dodgy lodgings, but we wouldn’t have had the same journey and experience. Without the time pressure, jeopardy and our machines’ questionable reliability – as well as the challenges and other comedy entrants – it would have just been another trip. The SkinFlint Rally was so much more – a life experience (and charity fundraiser) that I’ll not soon forget. Bike

How to go SkinFlinting

Raise money for your favourite charity and take on other SkinFlinters in this year’s event. The 2025 Rally is a three-day challenge, starting on 18 September and visiting Calais and Prague before ending in Bovec, Slovenia. The organisers are working on a category for bikes following Alastair and Pete’s glorious triumph, but currently you’ll still be in with the cars.

» To sign up, visit rugby113.sumupstore.com/product/skinflint-rally-2025-tickets or search for ‘SkinFlint 2025’ on Facebook.

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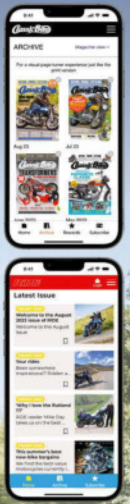

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KNOW HOW

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R&G ELEVATION
ContiRace

Thing of the month

R&G single-sided stand £155

This stand holds my bikes securely and upright for a start, which is not the case with many stands for Pro-Arm bikes. It's easy to get different pins (£25-£50, depending on fitment) so it's propped up a Honda, KTM, Triumph and Ducati. The larger ones are nylon-covered with a cut-out for the hub nut securing clip so they slide in easily, though the small-diameter alloy pins need a squirt of dry lube. This one is 11 years old but you wouldn't know it, paint chips aside. It'll never get sold with a bike…

Chris Newbigging

rg-racing.com

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE

Paul Lang
Fussy sod

Looks beyond the V-Strom 800RE's looks, rather likes it.

John Westlake
Tightwad

Reveals the top-value clobber he wears on a summery day out.

Simon Kennedy
Cables expert

Explains why it's not just canaries that need a quality birdcage.

Lyle Armitage
Teen rider

Waxes lyrical about swapping his moped for a Yamaha R125.

Niall Mackenzie
Racing legend

Shows editor how it's done on a trackday masterclass.

Mark Graham
Oddities officer

Regales over another machine that moved the goalposts.

[The Verdict]

'It's won me over'

Designer Paul Lang was repelled by the **Suzuki V-Strom 800RE**'s looks. But its relentless usefulness wore him down…

By **Paul Lang**

Remove your panniers and brain and you've got yourself a rapid B-road weapon

As a graphic designer, my life is all about making things look appealing, so I had immediate problems with the RE. Each time I clapped eyes on it I desperately wanted to feel some tingling of lust, some smidgeon of pride, something, anything except mild disgust…

However, after 5500 miles it's won me over. I still wish it looked prettier, but I do now want one in my garage.

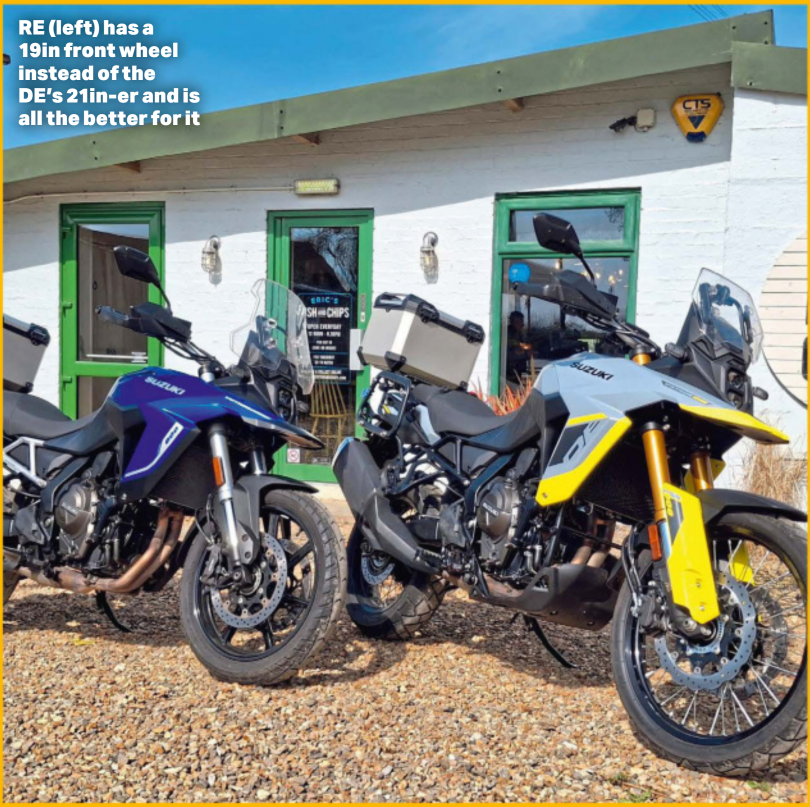
My conversion to V-Stromery started with the engine. The parallel twin is a lesson in midrange shunt and has the lazy roll-on friendliness of some larger bikes. The throttle response is velvety and accurate, the top end is fizzy enough for me to keep up with my mates, and it has just enough vibration to remind me I'm on a motorcycle, not a food blender.

Then there's the handling. The suspension hasn't got the plushness of the more off-roady DE, but the RE makes up for it with handling and steering that's *slightly* more road-orientated. When I needed to get a jog on I loved chucking it into every corner and giggling at how well it punched above its weight. There's something deeply satisfying about blasting about on a bike that looks like it shouldn't be capable of such juvenile antics.

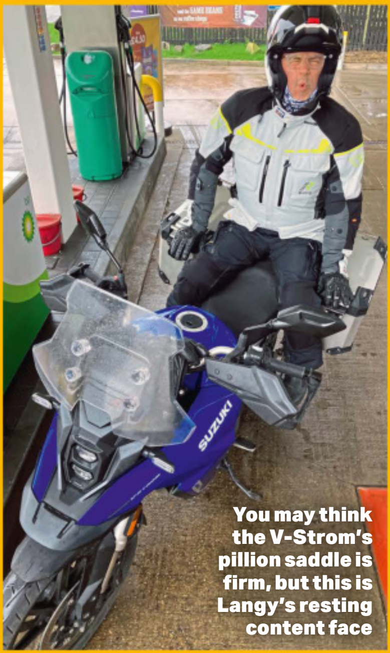
And finally – and this is a biggie – there's the RE's immense practicality. The saddle is all-day comfy, and as a shorty I had no problems touching the ground without speccing the lower seat. I rode pillion for miles and that saddle is almost as good, with pegs at just the right height. We had the Tour version (aluminium panniers and top box, £10,399), and the panniers were super-easy to get on and off. The screen is okay. The fuel range is good. The list of practical wins is long.

Departing editor Armitage borrowed it for a big trip and summed it up perfectly on his return: 'Yes, it's as visually enticing as a concrete paving slab, but what a great bike. If you want an efficient, capable, comfortable, do-it-all workhorse there aren't many better than this.

'I like the seat and fuel efficiency, don't mind the dash and switchgear, enjoy the handiness of a top box, but wish the screen had a natty F900XR-style height adjuster. It's easy to imagine walking past the RE in a dealer, attracted by the superior styling and colours of any other motorcycle you can name. But the 800's got that same just-get-on-with-it excellence that made the V-Strom 650 so popular with folk who ride all the time.' **PL**



RE (left) has a 19in front wheel instead of the DE's 21in-er and is all the better for it

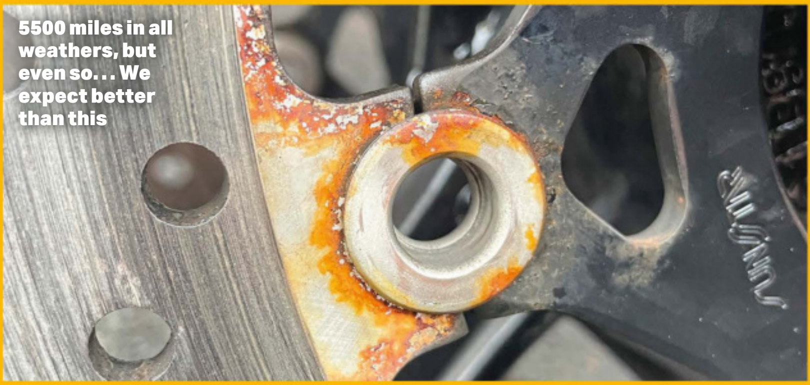


You may think the V-Strom's pillion saddle is firm, but this is Langy's resting content face

3:18
TC
N
GEAR

Electronics are all very competent. Shame there's no cruise control though

Screen height is changed by the not hugely convenient method of undoing four Allen bolts



5500 miles in all weathers, but even so... We expect better than this

FACTS AND FIGURES

Wet weight
223kg

Top speed
125mph

Fuel figures
52
MPG Average

Tank size:
20 litres
Distance to fuel light:
180 miles
Range:
228 miles

Price £10,399 **Engine** 776cc 8v DOHC parallel twin **Power** 82bhp @ 8500rpm **Torque** 58 lb.ft @ 6800rpm (tested) **Rake/trail** 26°/124mm **Wheelbase** 1515mm **Seat height** 825mm **Colours** Grey, red, blue, green, black **Availability** Now

BITS I WOULD ADD

» CENTRESTAND, £215
It's slightly crap that the RE doesn't come with a centrestand as standard, but that's how they keep the total price down. This one's from the Suzuki catalogue.

» HEATED GRIPS, £389
No bike with touring pretensions should be able to enter the UK without them. If you find the price of Suzuki's a bit salty, cheaper aftermarket ones are available...

» KAOKO CRUISE CONTROL, £100
If the lack of cruise control annoys you, this is the best option. It fits to the bar end and uses friction to hold the throttle steady. Just twist to release.

THE LAST WORD

» As a piece of hardware built to do a job, it's phenomenal. Should you have one in your garage? Yes, but tucked away and brought out when a drudge-worthy commute needs making fun, or you need to go big miles with zero effort, or you and a pillion fancy a comfy jaunt. In many ways it has the same utilitarian vibe as the old V-Strom 650, but it's far more versatile because the engine is livelier and the handling sweeter. Please, Suzuki, just give it a facelift...

[Knowledge]

New bikes

Maybe not the colour we'd pick, but handsome all the same

Simple dash suits the G/S perfectly

BMW R12 G/S

Trusty air/oil-cooled 1170cc motor puts on its best '70s Paris-Dakar trousers

What's new? That depends where you start from. Compare it with the R nineT it's based on and updates include a new chassis and a Euro5-tweaked engine. Sit it next to the new R12 nineT, and the only differences are the bespoke off-road bodywork, fully adjustable long-travel suspension, twin-piston Brembos, a 21in front wheel and Metzeler Karoo Street rubber.

***Bike's* opinion** Okay, maybe it is a cynical marketing ploy aimed at snaring dewy-eyed old codgers like us with Dakar fantasies. But it's also rather good. Of all the R12 retros it's the most generously proportioned, making it ideal for taller riders. It carries its weight well enough to be lithe, manageable and fun on and off-road, especially compared to big capacity, top-heavy adventure bikes (R1300GSA, we're looking at you). It has electronic aids, deep paint finishes and creature comforts galore, but still manages to feel like a pukka dirt bike, albeit one with refined suspension, butter-smooth throttle control and excellent road grip. It's a simple, stripped down, feel-good bike that oozes character.

New Tracer 7: friskier than ever

Yamaha Tracer 7

Same power, new everything else lifts Tracer 7 up a level

What's new? Updated electronics, upgraded suspension, and a few dimensions tweaked for more comfort. A ride-by-wire throttle allows three rider modes and cruise control, and a new slipper clutch gives a lighter feel at the lever. Power stays at 72bhp.

***Bike's* opinion** The upgrades work. The changes are immediately apparent and become more obvious the longer you're in the saddle. The KYB suspension is set on the side of speed rather than comfort, but not obtrusively. And the new brakes and electronics are excellent. It costs £8804; better-equipped GT is £10,104.

Hello B-road heaven

Fantic Caballero 500 Rally

Heaps of fun on B-roads and competent off-road, too

What's new? New engine built in Italy instead of China, a few tickles to freshen the street-scrambler's appeal, plus a 21in front wheel for more dirt ability.

***Bike's* opinion** The motor is smooth and refined – unless you thrash it, when it starts to vibrate intrusively – and it has a charming, thudding feel. And there's a feel of real craftsmanship and considered engineering that often goes AWOL on low-volume models like this. The 21in front wheel doesn't kill the road handling, either. At £7199 it feels like good value considering its spec and components.

Guzzi hit the bullseye with the V85 TT, according to Jason

[Why I love my...]

2021 Moto Guzzi V85 TT

Jason Richards extols the virtues of Guzzi's GS alternative

I've always liked unusual bikes – my previous ride was a Buell Ulysses and I used to have a Gilera RC600 – but when the V85 first came out in 2019 I couldn't afford one. Then in 2021 they released the centenary version in green and grey with the brown saddle and I really liked that – it was classy. I did think about a GS, but they're massive and expensive – I couldn't justify one for the casual riding I do.

So I bought a new pre-registered V85 in 2022. It was a 2021-plate with 120 miles on it – all my previous bikes have been used but I wanted to keep my hands clean for a few years so I splashed out.

I've done several UK trips on it plus lots of rides round Wales [where Jason lives] and it's done everything I wanted it to. The shaft drive is great for touring, it's very comfortable and 80bhp makes it fast enough for me. All I've done is fit some deflectors to reduce the turbulence behind the screen. It does run a bit lean and hot due to emission regulations; some owners fix that with different exhaust headers and bypass valves, but I haven't bothered.

The main problem with any Guzzi is there aren't many dealers. There used to be two near me in Bridgend, but both have closed. Now I have to travel to Bristol to Downend Bikes to get it serviced. The mechanic was really friendly and encouraged me to service it myself because it's so easy. I'm an engineer by trade so I know what I'm doing, but I didn't want the hassle.

> 'It's done everything I wanted it to'

It's definitely a keeper. Besides the characterful engine, the comfort and the way it racks up miles so easily, I also like that people often don't know what it is. For me that's a big part of enjoying a bike now I've grown out of going fast everywhere. If I was to get rid of it, the only thing I'd consider replacing it with is another Guzzi.

Buying tips

» What to look for Valve clearances are every 6000 miles, so make sure it's not being flogged to avoid a bill. There have been a few remapping updates, so ask a dealer if it's up to date. Check the final drive for leaks. Check the switchgear isn't dicky.

» What to pay From £5000

» Insurance For a great deal go to mcncompare.com

[Knowledge]

Listings

This isn't a limp brochure-style round-up of all the bikes you can buy. No, your guide is far more useful as it **only contains bikes that we have tested**, with comparable on-the-road prices plus data, expert opinion and must-know detail gathered by fussy full-time testers. We do hundreds of thousands of miles, dyno, datalog, weigh and answer the big questions. Don't buy a new bike without reading this first.

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
APRILIA uk.aprilia.com, 00800 15565500 *Bike's* choice: Tuono Factory defines the supernaked class… but we'd buy an RS660								
RSV4 Factory	£23,150	1099cc V4	186mph*	214bhp**	45mpg	Ace engine, great suspension and electronics, exemplary steering. Also tiny, and depreciates.	9/10	Jul '21
Tuono V4 Factory	£18,950	1099cc V4	165mph	178bhp	35mpg	Superb motor, crisp chassis, exotic-yet-friendly. Cool. Non-Factory model is everyday usable.	10/10	Aug '25
Tuareg 660	£10,750	659cc twin	120mph*	79bhp**	59mpg**	Ténéré rival is less rounded but has more tech and better suspension. Rugged, fun, but a bit raw.	8/10	Oct '22
RS660	£10,450	659cc twin	139mph	91bhp	45mpg	Sportsbike handling, punch and tech; sports-tourer comfort and usability. Impressive thing.	10/10	Dec '24
Tuono 660	£9,850	659cc twin	135mph*	90bhp*	50mpg	Comfier and more agile than RS660, more fun than a Street Triple. Fancier Factory version £10k.	9/10	Jun '21
BENELLI benelli.com, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: not ridden it yet, but the Leoncino 800 Trail looks tidy…								
TRK 502	£4,938	500cc twin	95mph*	46bhp**	72mpg**	Lacks a little balance and refinement, but good value distance tool. Italy's best-selling big bike.	6/10	Mar '18
BIMOTA bimotauk.co.uk, 01603 920240 *Bike's* choice: radical, extreme, whacky, beautiful… who wouldn't want a Tesi?								
Tesi H2	£59,000	998cc V4	190mph*	237bhp**	28mpg	Epic supercharged motor in delicious hub-steered chassis. Exquisite, wild, thirsty, expensive.	8/10	Sep '21
BMW bmw-motorrad.co.uk, 0800 777155 *Bike's* choice: yeah, it's predictable… but brilliance of the GS can't be ignored								
R18 Classic	£19,540	1802cc flat twin	115mph*	91bhp**	51mpg	Ace boxer cruiser spoilt a tad by its slightly Harley-ish screen and bags, but still a tidy device.	8/10	May '21
R18	£17,480	1802cc flat twin	113mph	87bhp	50mpg	Top mix of modernity, quality and tradition. Roctane model (£22k) has less bling, more handling.	9/10	Jul '21
K1600GT	£21,100	1649cc inline 6	154mph**	158bhp**	48mpg**	Magical motor, amazing agility, self-levelling suspension, all the toys… It's a sporty-super-tourer.	9/10	Jul '22
R1300GS TE	£18,465	1300cc flat twin	135mph**	138bhp	49mpg	Less weight, more oomph, fancy toys – it's the best big GS yet. But the Ducati Multi' V4 is slicker…	9/10	Jul '24
R1250RT	£17,350	1254cc flat twin	142mph	117bhp	50mpg	Go-to tourer isn't to all tastes but you can't argue that the variable-valve radar-shod twin is top.	9/10	Dec '21
R1250RS SE	£15,410	1254cc flat twin	139mph	127bhp	50mpg	Fast, comfy, accomplished, lots of tech – sports-tourers aren't dead. Not perfect, but it's close.	9/10	May '20
R1250R	£12,330	1254cc flat twin	150mph*	134bhp**	60mpg**	Ace variable-valve motor in friendly, comfy, capable chassis. Better pure road bike than a GS?	9/10	Aug '19
R12 nineT	£14,420	1170cc flat twin	140mph*	108bhp**	55mpg**	High-quality retro with thumping twin, solid handling, top details, and more tech than ever. Ace.	9/10	May '24
M1000RR	£36,040	999cc inline 4	195mph*	209bhp*	36mpg*	Wild homologation exotica with stupid power and wings – yet you can ride it to work. Mind-blowing.	9/10	Dec '23
M1000XR	£22,580	999cc inline 4	173mph	190bhp	42mpg	Adventure meets WSB. Epic... but a bit vibey and no luggage options. Not sure why you'd want it.	7/10	Oct '24
S1000RR Sport	£18,610	999cc inline 4	190mph*	207bhp**	44mpg**	Amazing mix of insane performance and usability, but latest one not quite as friendly as it used to be.	9/10	Feb '25
S1000XR TE	£18,340	999cc inline 4	155mph	161bhp	43mpg	High-rise sportsbike. Fast, agile, well equipped. Also got an odd seat. Very good, but not perfect.	8/10	May '25
S1000R Sport	£15,315	999cc inline 4	167mph	163bhp	48mpg	Not shouty, but epic: agility, ride, engine and spec are superb. M1000R (£19,480) not worth extra.	10/10	Aug '22
F900XR	£10,890	895cc twin	125mph*	103bhp	57mpg	Easy-to-use Tracer rival with eager twin, fit chassis. Better value than ever, but the Yam is better.	7/10	Aug '25
F900GS	£11,995	895cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	60mpg**	Better on road and trail than previous 850. Not full of character, but the best GS for greenlaning.	8/10	May '24
F750GS	£8,995	853cc twin	110mph*	76bhp	69mpg**	Slim front tyre and 19in wheel make this detuned 850 a better road bike. But lacks some 'wow'.	7/10	May '18
BSA bsacompany.co.uk *Bike's* choice: there's only one model so far, good job it's quite compelling…								
Gold Star	£5,171	652cc single	105mph*	43bhp	58mpg	A2-legal retro with '50s style, decent quality and iconic badge. For laid-back Sunday pootles.	8/10	Jul '25
CCM ccm-motorcycles.com, 01204 544930 *Bike's* choice: of the various Spitfire variants the flat-tracker models look coolest								
Spitfire Bobber	£12,767	600cc single	100mph*	55bhp**	56mpg	Curious mix of laid-back bobber styling with stiff chassis and revvy power. Not mega, but good.	8/10	Jan '20
Street Moto	£9995	600cc single	100mph*	55bhp**	55mpg*	Punchy, simple, light back-lane tool. Fun, not practical. R (11,495) has light wheels, posh shock.	8/10	Dec '24
CFMOTO cfmoto.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Chinese bikes come of age – 450MT is a seriously good A2 adventurist								
800NK Sport	£6,171	799cc twin	130mph*	94bhp**	45mpg*	Basically it's KTM 790 Duke with a few different parts and fresh looks. It's good and it's cheap.	8/10	Nov '23
700CL-X Heritage	£5,171	693cc twin	117mph	64bhp**	55mpg	Chirpy, fun, usable, good spec, long warranty. It's good… but no longer cheap next to finer rivals.	7/10	Mar '23
450MT	£5,699	449cc twin	112mph*	46bhp**	65mpg*	As good as a Ténéré on trails, extremely robust, good spec, keen price. Why buy anything else?	9/10	Mar '25
450SR S	£5,699	449cc twin	115mph*	46bhp**	65mpg	Eager yet smooth motor, agile handling, single-sider, TFT... it's as sporty as A2 gets. Impressive.	9/10	Oct '24
DUCATI ducatiuk.com, 0845 718500 *Bike's* choice: effective, fun and funky, the DesertX is so damn desirable								
Multistrada V4 Rally	£24,367	1158cc V4	155mph*	170bhp**	43mpg**	Most sophisticated, rounded, clever Ducati ever. Staggeringly complete. Pricey, yes. Also epic.	10/10	Mar '25
Diavel V4	£24,167	1158cc V4	150mph*	166bhp**	44mpg**	Caricature looks, raked stance, wild power, silly tail lights. And amazing. Not for everyone, mind.	8/10	Apr '23
Panigale V4 S	£27,651	1103cc V4	191mph	203bhp	39mpg	Stupid-fast, sharp, needs working to get the best out, but still feels mega to 'normal' folk. Wow.	9/10	Apr '25
Streetfighter V4 S	£23,661	1103cc V4	169mph	181bhp	34mpg	Fast, sexy, loud, desirable… but constantly a full-on experience. SP2 version (£32k) even sillier.	8/10	Jul '24
Scrambler 1100 Pro	£12,051	1079cc V-twin	110mph*	83bhp**	45mpg*	1100 Evo-engined, easy-riding Scrambler has charming twin and more comfort than 800s.	8/10	Nov '22
Panigale V4 R	£39,151	998cc V4	195mph*	215bhp**	35mpg**	Screaming, sharp, ballistic homologation tool. Amazing. But cheaper S is as good for most of us.	8/10	Nov '23
DesertX	£17,467	937cc V-twin	130mph*	110bhp**	41mpg	Sexy dual-purpose tool perfectly balances road and off-road needs. Our 2022 Bike of the Year.	10/10	Oct '22
SuperSport 950	£16,367	937cc V-twin	145mph*	113bhp**	43mpg	Not super fast or whizzpop, but a top, usable, sporty (and overlooked) road bike for normal folk.	9/10	Jan '18
Monster	£11,767	937cc V-twin	135mph*	110bhp**	45mpg*	Light, fun, usable, quality roadster with badge appeal. Mega. SP (£14k) sharper but less usable.	10/10	Feb '22
Panigale V2 S	£17,167	890cc V-twin	160mph*	118bhp**	53mpg**	Lighter, friendlier and less 'grr' than any previous Ducati sportsbike, but still slick and fast. Ace.	9/10	May '25
Streetfighter V2 S	£16,151	890cc V-twin	160mph*	118bhp**	53mpg**	Less power, speed and edge than before – and better for it. Still a Ducati, but the friendliest yet.	8/10	Aug '25
Multistrada V2 S	£16,562	890cc V-twin	145mph*	114bhp**	47mpg	Refined like no Ducati twin before. Also comfy, swift, high-tech and top quality. Pricey but mega.	9/10	Apr '25
Scrambler Icon	£10,367	803cc V-twin	123mph	72bhp*	47mpg	Image and quality matched by much-improved dynamic. Easy in town, great on back roads.	8/10	Jan '24
Hyper' 698 Mono	£12,367	659cc single	123mph	76bhp**	59mpg	Fruitiest single ever is light, responsive, engaging. But it craves twisty roads and a skilled rider.	8/10	Oct '24
FANTIC fanticmotoruk.com *Bike's* choice: there are three versions of the Cabellero, but just go for the best colour (so that's the Scrambler)								
Caballero 700	£9,671	689cc twin	115mph*	74bhp**	46mpg*	Retro scrambler built around Yam's great MT-07 motor. Good, has its moments… but not ace.	7/10	Jan '24

Who'd have thunk it?

» Ducati have come a fair way since being known for rattly, thuddy V-twins. But even the most forward-looking optimist can't have predicted the firm famed for unyielding sportsbikes would become a motocross force. Or that they'd run a dirt school here in Blighty. Ducati's MX Experience opens at four venues as this issue goes on sale, giving you chance to enjoy proper dirt tuition and/or scare yourself silly on a new Desmo450 MX. Cost? £220. We don't guarantee you'll be doing this first time out, mind. Head to ducatimxexperience.co.uk

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES
are available digitally on iPad and Android

*** Claimed * Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Caballero 500	£6,121	449cc single	100mph*	43bhp**	60mpg	Rev-happy, ex-enduro single in a light, good-quality package. Frantic on long rides, but top fun.	8/10	Oct '19
HARLEY-DAVIDSON harley-davidson.com, **0871 6412508** *Bike's* choice: the Fat Bob has looks, finish, good ride… and funny name								
CVO Street Glide	£40,495	1977cc V-twin	120mph*	120bhp*	50mpg	Best ever H-D tourer. Refined, classy, with huge grunt and nimbleness. Unique experience.	9/10	Jan '24
Low Rider S	£19,795	1868cc V-twin	115mph	93bhp*	50mpg**	Top looks and noise, more fun to ride than you think. But better in California than Croydon.	6/10	Jan '20
CVO Road Glide	£40,495	1923cc V-twin	105mph*	105bhp**	43mpg**	The defining H-D full-dress tourer with extra bling. Luxurious, surprising, expensive… unique.	8/10	Sep '23
Street Glide Special	£27,495	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	40bhp*	45mpg*	Classic looks, decent suspension, good finish and latest 8v motor is the best yet. Fine thing.	8/10	Dec '16
Breakout	£25,195	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Low-slung, drag-inspired cruiser that rides better than expected. Classy, refined hot-rod.	8/10	Dec '17
Street Bob	£14,995	1745cc V-twin	110mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Classic chopper-ish lines, clean handling, modern 8v power. But Fat Bob is far better.	6/10	Dec '17
Low Rider ST	£21,295	1923cc V-twin	115mph*	106bhp	40mpg*	Stonking motor, surprising handling, bold style, lovely finish. Odd riding position, otherwise fab.	8/10	Jul '22
Pan America Special	£17,295	1252cc V-twin	135mph**	148bhp**	43mpg	Comfy, composed, brisk, lots of equipment. Very good, but not quite a GS or Multistrada rival.	8/10	Sep '21
Sportster S	£15,145	1252cc V-twin	120mph*	119bhp**	50mpg	Fastest, smoothest, best handling, most techy Harley cruiser ever. Ace… but lacks the H-D feel.	8/10	Nov '21
Nightster Special	£14,495	975cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp**	52mpg**	Smallest engine in H-D's range. Decent looks, modern ride, but lacks Harley soul. A bit… odd.	6/10	Aug '22
HONDA honda.co.uk/motorcycles, **0845 2008000** *Bike's* choice: Hornet's good, Blade's epic… but have you ridden an NT1100? Great tool								
GL1800 Gold Wing Tour	£25,649	1833cc flat-six	112mph	125bhp**	51mpg	Huge, OTT, but smart suspension, toys and utter refinement mean it's still the grand-tour king.	8/10	Dec '22
CBR1000RR-R Blade SP	£23,499	1000cc inline 4	185mph*	215bhp**	42mpg**	Revvy, focused, full of HRC-ness. But also refined, classy, and more usable than you think.	9/10	Feb '25
Africa Twin Adv' Sport	£17,649	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	44mpg	All the tech, plush optional semi-active, classy feel, huge range. And daft switchgear. Hey-ho.	9/10	Nov '24
Africa Twin	£13,049	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	47mpg	Feels like a big, refined enduro bike, so is different to a GS. Cheaper too. Daft switches and dash.	8/10	Jul '24
NT1100	£14,099	1084cc twin	123mph	97bhp	52mpg	Cross between Africa Twin and Deauville. Not exciting, but high-spec, plush, quietly ace tourer.	9/10	May '25
CMX1100 Rebel	£6,135	1084cc twin	125mph*	86bhp**	52mpg	Africa Twin motor in cheery, usable, well-made cruiser. Not plush, but fun and very affordable.	8/10	Jan '22
CB1000 Hornet SP	£10,099	1000cc inline 4	150mph*	155bhp	48mpg**	Powerful, fine spec, great ride. Not like a 'cheap' S1000R – think more ace-for-£10k naked.	9/10	Sep '25
XL750 Transalp	£9,999	755cc twin	135mph*	91bhp*	58mpg	Smooth, easy to ride, great ergonomics, and cool colours. But revvy twin doesn't suit the bike.	8/10	Aug '23
CB750 Hornet	£6,999	755cc twin	140mph*	91bhp**	65mpg**	Simple, honest, fun, great spec, class-leading power – and affordable too. But GSX-8S is nicer…	9/10	Jul '23
X-ADV	£11,249	745cc twin	105mph*	54bhp**	70mpg*	Off-road scooter you'll never take off-road. Pricey too. But also practical, enjoyable and top fun.	8/10	Mar '25
Forza 750	£9,999	745cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	70mpg	Capable bike with looks and practicality of a scooter. And DCT. Odd concept, ace execution.	9/10	May '21
NC750X	£7,849	745cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	70mpg	Flexible twin, big mpg, agile, clever storage. Not flash, but very useful. DCT (£830) is worth it.	10/10	Nov '21
CBR650R E-Clutch	£9,899	649cc inline 4	138mph	86bhp	54mpg	Flexible, handsome, fun, fast-enough road sportsbike. Smart auto clutch is genuinely useful.	8/10	Aug '24
CB650R	£9,399	649cc inline 4	140mph	93bhp**	50mpg	Naked version of CBR (above) is fabulously balanced. Quality, dynamic, value all superb.	9/10	May '19
CBR600RR	£10,529	599cc inline 4	170mph*	119bhp**	52mpg**	Shrieking power, epic agility, pinpoint steering, top quality. Tiny and demanding, yes. But mega.	9/10	Oct '24
GB350S	£3,949	348cc single	85mph*	21bhp**	70mpg**	Charming retro with old-school quality. A lot slower than a Speed 400, but plush, classy, cheap.	8/10	Jun '25
CRF300L	£5,829	286cc single	80mph*	27bhp**	70mpg*	Fit green-laner, easy commuter, bit quicker than old 250. Rally (£6499) has big tank and screen.	7/10	Aug '22
Super Cub	£3,869	125cc single	65mph*	9.2bhp	124mpg	Descendent of iconic step-thru' is charming. Ownership by urban folk should be compulsory.	8/10	Jul '19
HUSQVARNA husqvarnamotorcycles.com/gb *Bike's* choice: Supermoto is desirable, funky, silly… and yet usable day-to-day								
Norden 901	£12,699	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	Attractive reworking of KTM 890 Adventure. Capable, nicely made, but lacks a 'wow' moment.	7/10	Oct '22
Svartpilen 801	£10,499	799cc twin	130mph*	104bhp**	50mpg*	KTM 790 Duke motor in a classier, calmer chassis. Not cheap, but refined, good spec, nice feel.	8/10	Oct '24
701 Supermoto	£10,399	693cc single	121mph	71bhp	54mpg	Engaging, fun at sensible speed, frugal, sexy, friendlier than it looks. Proper middleweight tool.	9/10	Sep '17
701 Enduro	£12,299	693cc single	120mph*	71bhp	54mpg	Proper dirt bike, yet refined, frugal and plush on the road. Big-tank LR (long range) version, too.	9/10	Apr '19
Svartpilen 401	£5,599	375cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	65mpg*	Built for A2 riders avoiding the mainstream. Essentially KTM's fine 390 Duke with more style.	7/10	Jul '18
INDIAN indianmotorcycle.co.uk *Bike's* choice: classic character, modern quality, unique feel – Scout is a standout cruiser								
Chief Dark Horse	£15,195	1890cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp*	60mpg	Big twin has stripped-back cool, walloping drive, surprising agility. Engaging trad' cruiser.	8/10	Feb '24
Chieftain PowerPlus	£27,595	1834cc V-twin	125mph*	127bhp**	40mpg*	Huge bagger with hugely grunty (134 lb.ft) and refined motor, full bling and tech. Even handles.	9/10	May '25
Challenger	£21,766	1770cc V-twin	112mph**	122bhp*	46mpg*	Full-on tourer with ace water-cooled motor, physics-defying chassis, full tech. Watch out, H-D.	8/10	Jan '20
101 Scout	£16,095	1250cc V-twin	120mph	110bhp	40mpg*	Impressive mix of trad' cruiser flair and sporty (ish) credentials. Engaging, amusing, classy.	8/10	Aug '24
FTR1200R Carbon	£16,695	1203cc V-twin	140mph*	123bhp**	38mpg	Stylish, high-quality, sporty retro with ace V-twin. We preferred it with the old 19in wheel, mind.	8/10	Nov '22
KAWASAKI kawasaki.co.uk, **01628 856750** *Bike's* choice: has to be the Ninja Z H2. Friendly, usable, yet suitably deranged								
Versys 1000 SE GT	£17,468	1043cc inline 4	144mph	118bhp**	42mpg	Top-spec Versys with all the toys, luxurious ride, luggage… Ace two-up tourer, but expensive.	7/10	Feb '24
Versys 1100 SE GT	£17,349	1099cc inline 4	144mph	119bhp	40mpg	Gutsy, high-rise, high-spec 'adventure tourer'. Ace pillion bike. Lacks wow factor, but a class act.	8/10	Apr '25
Ninja 1100SX	£14,999	1099cc inline 4	149mph	124bhp	41mpg	UK's fave sports tourer is smooth, refined, well equipped. Bit dated? Who cares – it's still great.	9/10	Apr '25
Ninja H2 SX SE	£25,815	998cc inline 4	186mph*	197bhp**	39mpg	Sports-touring exotica. Not perfect, but classy, usable, and that motor… Base H2 SX is £21,735.	8/10	Jun '19
Z H2 SE	£17,667	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	The impressive Z H2 (below) with fine semi-active ride. It's the thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Jul '21
Z H2	£17,465	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	Mega blown H2 motor in bespoke naked chassis. Far more road focus than supernaked rivals.	8/10	Oct '20
Ninja ZX-10RR	£25,971	998cc inline 4	180mph	189bhp	44mpg	The already-capable ZX-10R with tuned motor and fancy wheels: basically a base for racing.	9/10	Jun '18
Z900RS	£11,522	948cc inline 4	143mph	102bhp	51mpg	Z900 in retro clobber. And better for it – dynamic, feel and detail are great. SE (£13k) even better.	8/10	Nov '22
Z900	£9,371	948cc inline 4	145mph*	123bhp**	52mpg**	If you grew up on inline fours, this is ace. Not as punchy as MT-09, but very good and well priced.	7/10	Apr '25
Z650RS	£8,115	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	65mpg**	Spot-on mix of modern Z650's abilities with cool '70s retro vibe. £150 extra for green? Worth it.	8/10	Jan '22

Bewildering numbers

» Honda are adding another production line at their subsidiary in India. It'll be the fourth assembly line at their plant in Vithalapur, Gujarat, which has already been expanded twice since opening in 2016. The new line will open in 2027 and will have the capacity to make 650,000 bikes a year, taking the plant's annual output to a whopping 2.61 million two-wheelers and making it their largest factory in the world. It's not just the bike numbers that are impressive – Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India employ a considerable 23,000 people.

Listings

** Claimed * Estimated

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Versys 650	**£7,422**	**649cc twin**	**115mph***	**62bhp***	**54mpg***	Twin-cylinder all-rounder is knocking on, but latest extras keep it valid. Fine multi-purpose tool.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
Vulcan S	**£7,615**	**649cc twin**	**115mph***	**61bhp****	**63mpg***	Affordable, good-looking, modern cruiser with ER-6 power. Surprising ability, keen price.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Ninja 650	**£6,967**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp****	**70mpg***	Z650 dressed up in ZX-10R costume. Comfy, easy-to-ride, cheery twin for J. Rea wannabes.	**9/10**	**May '17**
Z650	**£7,665**	**649cc twin**	**130mph***	**67bhp***	**70mpg***	Zed is fun, fit, frugal. Nice, but lacks sparkle next to a Hornet, MT-07 or Trident. It's knocking on…	**7/10**	**May '23**
Ninja 7 HEV	**£11,949**	**451cc twin**	**115mph***	**58bhp****	**85mpg**	World's first hybrid. Frugal,smooth, effortless on elec power. But also heavy, steady and pricey.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**
ZX-4RR	**£8,699**	**399cc four**	**130mph***	**76bhp****	**50mph***	Not A2, but a single-minded screaming race-rep. Small, demanding but also fabulous fun.	**8/10**	**Apr '24**
KOVE kovemotouk.com *Bike's* choice: surprising 800X rivals the Ténéré as a real dual-purpose tool. Fine thing								
800X Pro	**£8,499**	**799cc twin**	**130mph***	**81bhp**	**51mpg**	KTM 790-based motor, great chassis, fine spec. Not perfect, but ruddy close – it's superb value.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
510X	**£5,999**	**498cc twin**	**110mph***	**47bhp****	**60mpg***	Impressive spec, decent performance, big tank, attractive price. Credible A2 adventure bike.	**8/10**	**Nov '24**
KTM ktm.co.uk *Bike's* choice: practical, verging on sensible, but also very silly. It's the 890 SMT for us, please								
Super Adventure R	**£18,199**	**1301cc V-twin**	**155mph***	**158bhp****	**44mpg**	Like a rocket-powered 'crosser with cruise, Bluetooth and comfort. Mega… but Multi' V4 better.	**9/10**	**Nov '23**
1290 Super Duke GT	**£16,803**	**1301cc V-twin**	**159mph**	**158bhp**	**45mpg**	Mad power, sports handling, all the toys and eats miles. Couple of iffy bits, otherwise ace.	**9/10**	**Jan '19**
1390 Super Duke R Evo	**£17,622**	**1350cc V-twin**	**165mph**	**178bhp**	**42mpg**	Mighty fast yet friendly, sharp but safe, and loads of gizmos. Surprisingly usable supernaked.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
990 Duke	**£10,246**	**947cc twin**	**145mph***	**121bhp****	**60mpg****	More mature and finer quality than earlier Dukes, but still loopy. KTM's best naked… but pricey.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
890 SMT	**£11,434**	**899cc twin**	**130mph****	**103bhp***	**63mpg**	Sharper and more engaging than an adventure bike, more practical than a naked. And a bit silly.	**8/10**	**Feb '24**
890 Adventure	**£11,999**	**889cc twin**	**130mph***	**103bhp****	**63mpg****	The previous 790 with extra bhp, smoother delivery, tweaked chassis, more tech. Very good.	**8/10**	**Jan '21**
690 Enduro R	**£9,835**	**690cc single**	**115mph***	**73bhp****	**60mpg***	Super-clever Duke/Husky 701 lump in long-legged trailie. Pukka, classy, dual-purpose tool.	**8/10**	**Feb '16**
390 Adventure	**£6,299**	**373cc single**	**105mph***	**43bhp****	**56mpg**	Chirpy A2-legal adventurer looks like a 1290 (sort of). But it's basically a 390 Duke in wellies.	**8/10**	**Jul '20**
390 Duke	**£5,499**	**373cc single**	**108mph**	**41bhp**	**70mpg***	Revvy, eager motor in agile 125 chassis? Yes. Looks like the 1290 and less toy-like than it was.	**7/10**	**Jun '17**
LANGEN langenmotorcycles.co.uk; 01942 724059 *Bike's* choice: there's one model, which limits choice. Luckily it's amazing								
Two Stroke	**£32,580**	**249cc V-twin**	**130mph***	**74bhp****	**40mpg***	Pricey, yes. But stroker is deliciously engineered, fast, raw. We love it… but £33k is a lot for a 250.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
MASH mashmotorcycles.co.uk; 01264 889012 *Bike's* choice: go for the X-Ride (but budget for new tyres and suspension)								
650 X-Ride	**£4,699**	**644cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**60mpg***	Ex-Honda Dominator motor in 70s-style trailie. Good quality, keen price, let down by chassis.	**5/10**	**Apr '21**
Five Hundred 400	**£3,899**	**398cc single**	**80mph***	**28bhp****	**70mpg****	French brand, made in China, Honda-based motor. Iffy details, odd name, but cheap and fun.	**6/10**	**Dec '17**
MORBIDELLI morbidelli.co.uk *Bike's* choice: T1002V isn't fancy, but it's capable and remarkable value								
C1002V	**£8699**	**997cc twin**	**120mph***	**94bhp****	**52mpg**	Superb quality, refined big V-twin, huge spec, bargain price. Shame it lacks ground clearance.	**8/10**	**Jul '25**
T1002V	**£8199**	**997cc twin**	**120mph***	**89bhp****	**50mpg**	Like a V-Strom 1050 with more tech but £5k less. Not fancy, but an ace value adventure-tourer.	**8/10**	**Aug '25**
MOTO GUZZI uk.motoguzzi.it *Bike's* choice: unique image, sweet ride, classy quality; it's not fast or clever but V85 is lovely								
V100 Mandello S	**£14,900**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**108bhp**	**50mpg**	Sports-tourer is classy, comfy, capable, charismatic. Serious alternative to a Honda or BMW.	**9/10**	**Sep '23**
Stelvio	**£13,850**	**1042cc V-twin**	**135mph***	**113bhp****	**50mpg***	Brilliant V100 (above) in capable, classy, convincing adventure guise. Not a GS, but very good.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
V85 TT	**£11,400**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**50mpg***	Fabulous adventure mix of old-school charm, proper tech, comfort, and a cheerful dynamic.	**9/10**	**May '24**
V85 Strada	**£10,600**	**853cc V-twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp***	**50mph***	Stripped-back V85 has less tech, fewer fixings, but lighter wheels for sharper handling. Decent.	**8/10**	**May '24**
V9 Bobber	**£9,750**	**853cc V-twin**	**110mph***	**64bhp****	**55mpg***	Pleasing V-twin in a trendy, well-made package. Doesn't sell well so haggle yourself a top deal.	**8/10**	**Jun '16**
V7 Special	**£8,000**	**853cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**64bhp****	**63mpg**	Style, ride and badge all spot-on. 850 V-twin isn't as grunty as a Street Twin, but we forgive it.	**9/10**	**Jul '21**
MOTO MORINI motomorini.eu *Bike's* choice: you might need to be brave, but the Milano is a convincingly authentic Morini								
Milano	**£12,700**	**1187cc V-twin**	**145mph***	**114bhp****	**42mpg**	Instant chunky power, firm and direct chassis, neat 70s paint. Buying is a gamble, but it's cool.	**8/10**	**Nov '19**
X-Cape	**£6,999**	**649cc twin**	**109mph***	**59bhp****	**49mpg**	Made in China with CFMoto engine. Great spec, good quality, rides well. No Ténéré, but cheap.	**7/10**	**Mar '22**
MV Agusta mvagusta.co.uk, 0844 4128450 *Bike's* choice: latest Brutale is refined, usable, yet still exotic								
Enduro Veloce	**£20,000**	**931cc inline 3**	**149mph****	**122bhp****	**40mpg***	Fast, accurate, inspiring, surprisingly complete adventurer. But no use on trails. Expensive, too.	**7/10**	**Jan '25**
Dragster 800 RR SCS	**£18,220**	**798cc inline 3**	**150mph***	**138bhp***	**45mpg**	Expensive, yes. But also classy, high-spec, comfy, and refined like no MV before. Impressive.	**8/10**	**Jan '22**
Superveloce	**£18,980**	**798cc inline 3**	**160mph***	**146bhp****	**41mpg**	Super-sporty F3 in semi-retro dress. Fast, sharp, sounds top, looks superb, quite demanding.	**8/10**	**Mar '23**
Turismo Veloce Rosso	**£13,930**	**798cc inline 3**	**136mph**	**110bhp****	**48mpg***	Adventure bike? Nah, it's like a high-rise sportsbike. So-so ride, busy dash, but it's good.	**8/10**	**Jan '19**
Brutale 800 RR	**£15,590**	**798cc inline 3**	**153mph****	**138bhp****	**40mpg****	Top engine, nimble, great looks, ridiculous hard ride. Semi-auto clutch version a bit gimmicky.	**6/10**	**Apr '19**
NORTON nortonmotorcycles.com; 0121 565 4411 *Bike's* choice: Think Norton, think Commando… and it's good to ride, too								
V4SV	**£44,000**	**1200cc V4**	**180mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Not as slick as an M1000RR, expensive. So what? Brit sportsbike is solid, fast, beautiful, unique.	**8/10**	**Dec '23**
V4CR	**£42,000**	**1200cc V4**	**175mph***	**185bhp****	**40mpg***	Sculpted café racer is modern and old-school at the same time. Pricey but effective exotica.	**9/10**	**Oct '23**
Commando 961 SP	**£16,999**	**961cc twin**	**125mph***	**77bhp****	**40mpg***	Traditional pushrod Brit twin for the modern world. Sweet handling, well made, lots of character.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
ROYAL ENFIELD royalenfield.com/uk; 0844 412 8450 *Bike's* choice: Himalayan 450 is a superb mix of performance, quality and price								
Bear 650	**£6,749**	**648cc twin**	**110mph***	**47bhp****	**60mpg***	Splendid Inter' (below) in Scrambler form. Chunky looks, USD forks, longer suspension. Good.	**9/10**	**Mar '25**
Interceptor	**£6,599**	**648cc twin**	**110mph**	**44bhp**	**60mpg**	Charming twin has authentic feel, fine looks and attractive price. Think Indian-made Guzzi V7.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Himalayan 450	**£5,850**	**452cc single**	**90mph***	**40bhp****	**78mpg****	Rugged, functional appeal, now with more oomph and improved ride and quality. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Jul '24**
Guerrilla 450	**£4,850**	**452cc single**	**100mph***	**39bhp****	**83mpg**	Roadster version of Himi'. Great engine, otherwise a bit 'meh' – not as 'right' as a Speed 400.	**7/10**	**Feb '25**
Classic 350	**£4,619**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	The hugely successful Meteor dressed up like an old Bullet. Easy-going basic Sunday plodder.	**7/10**	**Aug '22**
Meteor	**£4,219**	**349cc single**	**72mph**	**19bhp**	**79mpg**	Simple, chirpy character, light handling, nicely made, and super cheap. Fast? No way. Fun? Yes.	**8/10**	**Nov '21**
SUZUKI suzuki-gb.co.uk; 0845 850 8800 *Bike's* choice: V-Strom 800DE is everything a mid-size adventure should be								
Hayabusa	**£18,599**	**1340cc inline 4**	**186mph***	**187bhp****	**42mpg****	There are more powerful bikes. But nothing goes stupid fast with the ease and class of a Busa.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**

Guzzi V2.0

» Moto Guzzi are embarking on their 'Road to 2121'. Having celebrated their 100th birthday in 2021, the Italian firm is going all 'future-proof' with a huge renovation of their site – including swanky new production areas and offices, but also a customer centre with 'a series of extraordinary events zones', museum, restaurant, and even a hotel. Don't worry: the famous wind tunnel will stay as part of the 'Wind Tunnel Plaza', and the iconic old buildings will be 'repurposed' for laboratories, test areas and restoration of classic Guzzboxes.

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES
are available digitally on iPad and Android

*** Claimed * Estimated*

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOP SPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
V-Strom 1050XT	**£13,865**	**1037cc V-twin**	**137mph**	**99bhp**	**52mpg**	Loads of gizmos, amazing screen, plush-yet-secure ride, solid motor. It's no GS… but top value.	**8/10**	**Dec '20**
GSX-S1000GX	**£14,799**	**999cc inline 4**	**145mph****	**150bhp***	**45mpg***	The GT (below) in adventure-sports guise. Not perfect, but ace suspension, toys, ride and feel.	**8/10**	**Apr '25**
GSX-S1000GT	**£12,899**	**999cc inline 4**	**155mph***	**150bhp***	**46mpg****	GSX-R oomph, comfort, lots of toys, fine looks. Trad' proper-fast-yet-friendly sports tourer.	**8/10**	**Apr '25**
Katana	**£12,699**	**999cc inline 4**	**152mph**	**147bhp**	**46mpg**	Superb GSX-S supernaked with sharp 80s-inspired styling. Bold yet usable, and underrated.	**8/10**	**Nov '19**
V-Strom 800DE	**£13,999**	**776cc twin**	**125mph***	**83bhp****	**52mpg**	Gutsy motor, proper comfort, better suspension than rivals, and fine spec list too. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Aug '23**
GSX-8R	**£8,999**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**52mpg***	Think GSX-R mixed with a commuter. Easy to ride, friendly, but also grunty, agile, plush. Lovely.	**9/10**	**Dec '24**
GSX-8S	**£8,299**	**776cc twin**	**130mph***	**82bhp****	**50mpg***	Usable grunt, secure handling, fine ride, nicely made. Pricier than MT-07 and Hornet, but better.	**9/10**	**Jul '23**
V-Strom 650 XT	**£8,965**	**645cc V-twin**	**115mph***	**60bhp***	**45mpg**	£700 over the base model (below) gets you hand guards and wire wheels. Worth it for the looks.	**7/10**	**Jul '17**
SV650	**£7,165**	**645cc V-twin**	**122mph**	**74bhp**	**50mpg**	Chirpy, cheerful, usable, quick, proven, though Yam MT-07 has a bit more zip and charm.	**7/10**	**Apr '19**
TRIUMPH triumphmotorcycles.co.uk *Bike's* choice: Speed Twin 1200 isn't perfect, but it's flippin' compelling								
Rocket 3 GT	**£22,695**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Huge motor is amazing, handling is ridiculous, but firm ride and sheer bulk limit use as 'real' GT.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
Rocket 3 R	**£21,995**	**2458cc inline 3**	**138mph****	**165bhp****	**35mpg**	Cruiser? Hardly. With a stiff chassis, handling and crazy grunt, the R is a Mad Max supernaked.	**8/10**	**Oct '24**
Tiger 1200 Rally Pro	**£18,295**	**1200cc inline 3**	**140mph***	**148bhp****	**55mpg****	Lots of power, tech, comfort and class, and they've stopped the vibes, too. Well done, Triumph.	**9/10**	**Aug '24**
Speed Twin 1200 RS	**£14,495**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**96bhp****	**50mpg**	Part classic thrummer, part wheel-lifting blingy supernaked. Classy, fast, desirable roadster.	**9/10**	**Feb '25**
Scrambler 1200 XE	**£13,295**	**1200cc twin**	**130mph***	**89bhp****	**56mpg**	Easy-going B-lane thrummer is classy, rewarding, sensibly priced. Think retro adventure bike.	**8/10**	**Jan '25**
Speedmaster	**£12,995**	**1200cc twin**	**110mph***	**76bhp****	**55mpg****	Low-slung Bobber transformed for the USA with beach 'bars, shiny bits and pillion perch.	**8/10**	**Sep '18**
Bonneville Bobber	**£12,995**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**77bhp****	**56mpg**	Oodles of grunt, capable chassis, spot-on stance and feel. Perfect blend of modern and retro.	**9/10**	**Jan '22**
Bonneville T120	**£11,795**	**1200cc twin**	**120mph***	**79bhp****	**54mpg**	Lolloping grunt, steadfast chassis, top finish. Hasn't Street Twin's agility, but has finer ride.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Speed Triple RR	**£17,950**	**1160cc inline 3**	**150mph**	**166bhp**	**39mpg**	RS (below) with fairing, GSX-R riding stance, posh suspension. Discontinued – get one for £13k.	**8/10**	**Jun '22**
Speed Triple RS	**£17,495**	**1160cc inline 3**	**175mph***	**178bhp****	**38mpg**	Awesome motor, ace outright handling, full tech. Mega. Bit stiff and focused for the road, mind.	**8/10**	**Jun '25**
Scrambler 900	**£9,795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	The Bonnie platform in laid-back, urban-ready scrambler form. Charming, if a little bit 'meh'.	**7/10**	**Jan '24**
Bonneville T100	**£9,595**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**54bhp****	**60mpg**	All the style and easy-going pleasures of the T120. Makes 24bhp less, but is £1900 (!) cheaper.	**9/10**	**Sep '18**
Speed Twin 900	**£8,795**	**900cc twin**	**110mph***	**64bhp****	**60mpg**	Handsome, pleasing, well-made retro with decent grunt and easy-to-flick chassis. Really good.	**9/10**	**Dec '22**
Tiger 900 Rally Pro	**£14,495**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	High-tech, high-spec adventurer really can go (almost) anywhere. Brisk, smooth, plush, lovely.	**9/10**	**Mar '24**
Tiger 900 GT Pro	**£13,895**	**888cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**106bhp****	**60mpg****	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer-tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizazz.	**9/10**	**Nov '24**
Tiger Sport 800	**£10,995**	**798cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**113bhp****	**58mpg**	Light, fruity, adaptable, comfy, smooth… it even sounds jolly nice. Our Bike of the Year 2025.	**9/10**	**Sep '25**
Street Triple 765 RS	**£11,295**	**765cc inline 3**	**145mph***	**128bhp****	**53mpg****	Best road-going sporty bike Triumph have ever made. Ace. Less-blingy R (£10,295) is great too.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
Tiger Sport 660	**£8,945**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**80bhp****	**60mpg****	660 Trident repackaged as a practical high-riding all-rounder. Giant-slaying brilliance.	**9/10**	**Mar '23**
Daytona 660	**£8,595**	**660cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**94bhp****	**58mpg****	Like a three-cylinder CBR650R. Fit motor, comfy, but not a sharp as rivals. Missing an edge.	**8/10**	**Dec '24**
Trident 660	**£7,895**	**660cc inline 3**	**129mph**	**75bhp**	**54mpg**	Affordable and friendly like an MT-07, sweet handling like a Street Trip'. Bit stiff, otherwise great..	**9/10**	**May '23**
Speed 400	**£5,195**	**398cc single**	**100mph***	**40bhp****	**80mpg****	A2-legal bike with ample performance, quality and 'proper Triumph' feel. Big seller for a reason…	**9/10**	**Jun '25**
VOGE vogeuk.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: it's not a premium model, but 900's value is remarkable								
DS900X	**£8671**	**895cc twin**	**125mph***	**94bhp****	**60mpg***	By Loncin, who make BMW motors. F900GS power, fine ride, staggering spec for the money.	**8/10**	**Jan '25**
YAMAHA yamaha-motor.co.uk, 01932 358000 *Bike's* choice: sporty and engaging, yet friendly and fun – MT-09 is a proper device								
R1M	**£24,460**	**998cc inline 4**	**186mph**	**192bhp**	**40mpg**	MotoGP-derived electronics + track-focused superbike = incredible. Limited availability.	**9/10**	**Feb '21**
MT-10 SP	**£16,510**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mpg**	Already amazing MT-10 with R1 SP's electronic suspenders. Great, if not obviously better.	**9/10**	**May '17**
MT-10	**£14,210**	**998cc inline 4**	**153mph**	**152bhp**	**38mpg**	Not as wild as some rivals, but cheaper, easier to ride, and still epic. Thinking rider's supernaked.	**9/10**	**Aug '22**
Niken GT	**£16,210**	**890cc inline 3**	**117mph**	**113bhp****	**45mpg***	Three-wheeler has more front-end grip than anything, fit motor, fine touring ability Ace, but odd.	**8/10**	**Aug '23**
Tracer 9 GT	**£14,354**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**62mpg**	Defining 'mid-size' upright sports tourer. Superb tech, dynamic, noise, comfort… hard to fault.	**10/10**	**Aug '25**
XSR900 GP	**£12,506**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**50mpg***	If this is the future of retro, sign us up. XSR in '80s fag-packet sportsbike form is a glorious thing.	**9/10**	**Sep '24**
R9	**£12,250**	**890cc inline 3**	**135mph***	**117bhp****	**50mpg***	Friendly, usable MT-09 motor in a proper, sharp, head-down sportsbike. Comfy? No. Ace? Yes.	**9/10**	**Sep '25**
Tracer 9	**£11,010**	**890cc inline 3**	**146mph**	**107bhp**	**47mpg**	Adventurer presence, comfort, practicality – it's a top road bike. High-spec GT worth the extra.	**9/10**	**Apr '23**
XSR900	**£10,610**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph**	**107bhp**	**49mpg**	Ace MT-09 reworked into a convincing '80s flat-bar superbike. Cool, fun, sexy, but a bit stiff.	**9/10**	**Nov '22**
MT-09 SP	**£11,310**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**48mpg**	Öhlins shock, classy forks, R1M paint job, brilliant engine. Superb everyday semi-supernaked.	**9/10**	**Oct '24**
MT-09	**£10,100**	**890cc inline 3**	**130mph***	**117bhp****	**49mpg***	Top triple has new-found handling prowess and tech, but keeps its usable playfulness. Proper.	**9/10**	**Jan '25**
Ténéré 700	**£10,404**	**689cc twin**	**120mph***	**72bhp****	**55mpg***	Retakes position as the defining mid-size adventurer. Classy, capable and fun on road or trail.	**9/10**	**Jul '25**
Tracer 7	**£8,810**	**689cc twin**	**125mph***	**70bhp**	**56mpg**	Super-fun MT-07 with practical niceties. The datum for all-rounder value. GT even better.	**9/10**	**Aug '20**
R7	**£8,910**	**689cc twin**	**130mph***	**72bhp****	**56mpg***	More than a faired MT-07. Lacks a bit of wow but properly sporty, ace in corners, fun, affordable.	**8/10**	**Aug '22**
XSR700	**£8,260**	**689cc twin**	**119mph**	**70bhp**	**49mpg**	MT-07 in period costume. Proof retro looks can work with a modern dynamic. LC paint is great.	**9/10**	**Jun '16**
MT-07	**£7,510**	**689cc twin**	**122mph***	**74bhp**	**48mpg**	Polished chassis adds mature edge to the fun and friendliness it's renowned for. Great bike.	**9/10**	**Aug '25**
R3	**£6,405**	**321cc twin**	**102mph***	**41bhp****	**65mpg**	Light, revvy, fun-to-ride, well finished. Ability and spec fight for title of best A2 sportsbike.	**8/10**	**May '19**
R125	**£5,302**	**125cc single**	**80mph***	**15bhp**	**92mpg**	R1 looks, big bike feel, clever engine. Easy to see why they sell so many to enthusiastic teens.	**8/10**	**May '19**
ZERO zeromotorcycles.com, +3172 5112014 *Bike's* choice: SR/S is good enough to convert stubborn petrolheads								
SR/S Premium	**£20,495**	**electric motor**	**124mph****	**110bhp****	**242mpc**	Fast, torquey, smooth, hi-spec, great to ride. Range and charge time bearable. Price a bit salty.	**8/10**	**Jul '22**
S	**£14,540**	**electric motor**	**86mph****	**59bhp****	**200mpc**	Simple commuter has basic chassis, slow charging and ain't cheap, but costs peanuts to run.	**6/10**	**Dec '20**

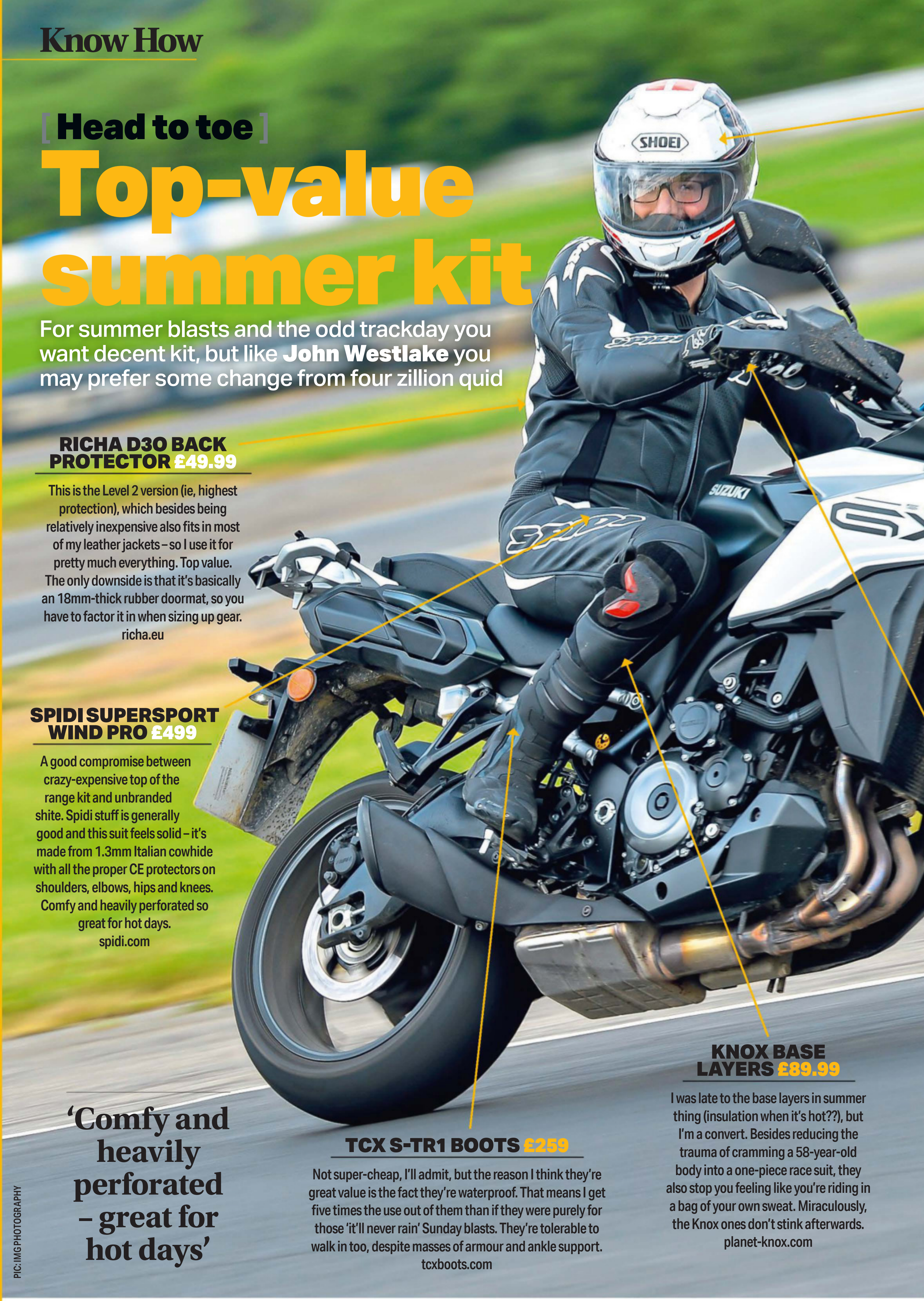
Phwoar, etc

This issue will have brightened up the supermarket news stand just a couple of weeks before this year's Suzuka 8 Hours endurance shindig. As part of their 70th birthday celebrations, Yamaha are entering a factory squad – the riders are MotoGP favourite Jack Miller (see page 46), World Superbike race winner Andrea Locatelli, and Katsuyuki Nakasuga, who's won 12 titles in Japan and is a four-time Suzuka victor. And the best bit? Their works R1 will be painted up like Nori Haga's YZF-R7 from 1999, with the crew in period-inspired gear. Yes.

[Head to toe]

Top-value summer kit

For summer blasts and the odd trackday you want decent kit, but like **John Westlake** you may prefer some change from four zillion quid



RICHA D3O BACK PROTECTOR £49.99

This is the Level 2 version (ie, highest protection), which besides being relatively inexpensive also fits in most of my leather jackets – so I use it for pretty much everything. Top value. The only downside is that it's basically an 18mm-thick rubber doormat, so you have to factor it in when sizing up gear. richa.eu

SPIDI SUPERSPORT WIND PRO £499

A good compromise between crazy-expensive top of the range kit and unbranded shite. Spidi stuff is generally good and this suit feels solid – it's made from 1.3mm Italian cowhide with all the proper CE protectors on shoulders, elbows, hips and knees. Comfy and heavily perforated so great for hot days. spidi.com

TCX S-TR1 BOOTS £259

Not super-cheap, I'll admit, but the reason I think they're great value is the fact they're waterproof. That means I get five times the use out of them than if they were purely for those 'it'll never rain' Sunday blasts. They're tolerable to walk in too, despite masses of armour and ankle support. tcxboots.com

KNOX BASE LAYERS £89.99

I was late to the base layers in summer thing (insulation when it's hot??), but I'm a convert. Besides reducing the trauma of cramming a 58-year-old body into a one-piece race suit, they also stop you feeling like you're riding in a bag of your own sweat. Miraculously, the Knox ones don't stink afterwards. planet-knox.com

> 'Comfy and heavily perforated – great for hot days'

PIC: IMG PHOTOGRAPHY

SHOEI GT-AIR 2 £349

Now the GT-Air 3 is out, you can pick up GT-Air 2s for sensible money. It's not as light as a full-on race lid and doesn't have all the aero cobblers, but I'm not fast enough to care. More important for me is that it's very comfortable, feels high-quality and has an easy visor change system.
shoei-europe.com

FURYGAN STYG20X GLOVES £139

As developed and used (apparently) by MotoGP chap Johann Zarco. All the stuff you expect on far more expensive gloves is here: Kevlar reinforcement of key areas, leather reinforced palm and fingers, and robust palm sliders. Loads of feel and very comfortable, too.
furygan.com

[Know it all]

Cables

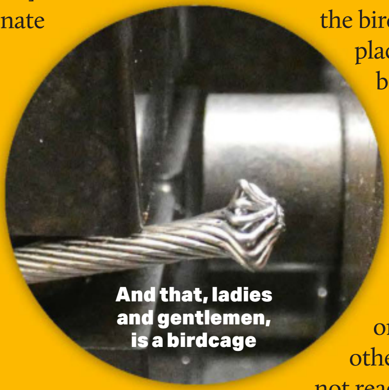
Simon Kennedy – boss of cable maestros Venhill – on why we should all appreciate high-quality birdcaging

We have 10 different wire specifications and between 40 and 50 shapes of nipple [the blob at the end of the cable you fit into a lever, clutch pull arm, etc – Ed].

For the most common combinations of wire and nipple we get wires pre-made with one end terminated [ie, the nipple is pre-fitted to save time – Ed]. For less common specs we terminate both ends ourselves.

We cut the wire to length and then slip it into a protective sleeving that is – in the case of our cables – lined with Teflon. There are cheaper alternatives – nylon, for example – but Teflon ensures the cable runs through the conduit as smoothly as possible.

We then fit any bends or adjusters required. We've got about 5000 different components in stock to allow us to make up cables for pretty much any bike. Also, we have records going back more than 50 years for every cable we've made, so we can look up a bike and see what it needs.



And that, ladies and gentlemen, is a birdcage

We then terminate the other end of the wire using a process called birdcaging, where a machine grips the wire and a punch pushes the end so hard that the wire's strands flare out into a birdcage shape – like a ball. The cable then goes to a solder station where the nipple is placed over the birdcage and soldered in place. All the gaps in the ball of wire are filled with solder, which stops the wire collapsing when put under load.

It's a vital process – you cannot afford to have poor-quality wire or dirty components, otherwise the solder will not react properly. If the quality isn't good, you could pull the brake, throttle or clutch and the nipple might fail.

Obviously that could be disastrous. It's why we inspect every single cable for quality and dimensional accuracy.

» Want to know more? You need to visit venhill.co.uk

[The best tyres for...]

All-round sporting fun

Metzeler Sportec M9 RR £300

metzeler.com

» I've loved every generation of the Sportec since the M3 (so four iterations), and the latest still does the do when it comes to frisky road riding in all conditions, with decent wear life. I used the M9 RRs on a Triumph Speed Triple RR in place of the OE Pirelli Supercorsa SPs (too aggressive, too limited heat range for the road), and it improved the bike no end. The profile is a touch more rounded and suits gentle countersteering inputs (as opposed to big heaves from the shoulder, as a track tyre is built for), so it's lighter on its toes at small to medium lean and gives more feedback. They dug in beautifully when cracking on through some stunning bits of the Massif Central, and were plenty secure in the rain up to and including inches of standing water on the autoroute. More or less everything a sports-touring tyre would do – but better at the fun stuff, if you don't require sub-zero performance and 10,000 miles from a set. Great for race reps or nakeds that like to crack on: there's even a 17/19in fitment for adventure bikes. *CN*

SPORTEC
SPORTEC M9 RR

'Light years ahead'

After a year on a moped, **Lyle Armitage** makes the step to a 125cc 'big' bike. Ah, remember the joy of that first taste…

N
TCS
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
0
MPH
108
x1000 r/min
ODO 564 mile
COOLANT 52 °C
E

Number in bottom left is climbing rapidly

The first ride: not letting rain put him off

When I started to think about moving up from my Lexmoto Hunter 50 to a 125, the first words that came to mind were 'two' and 'stroke'. Obviously, being 17, I want the raciest thing possible, so spent many hours on Facebook Marketplace looking for an Aprilia RS125 or Honda NSR125.

There was more to it than smoky performance. I was looking for a bike that appeared bigger than a 125 – at 6ft tall, I didn't want it to look like a pit bike. There were a few cheap RSs, but it soon became apparent that half-decent old two-strokes are fetching a lot of money; I wanted the pre-2006 RS125 with the GP-style curvy bodywork, and minty ones can fetch £5000. Knowing they can be finicky and require careful looking after – and not wanting my pedantic dad overseeing a warm-up procedure every morning – I realised a four-stroke would be less hassle, cheaper to run, and less likely to detonate on the way to college.

Bikes like the Kawasaki Ninja 125 and KTM RC125 came up a lot during searches, but having read plenty of reviews the Yamaha YZF-R125 was clearly the best choice. Great reputation, solid performance, and the looks of a bigger, more grown-up bike when put next to other four-stroke 125 sportsbikes.

Deep breath

The problem is that while there are plenty about, they have all been owned by… well, people like me. They all seem to have been modified with 180cc big-bore kits and fitted with stupid exhausts, to be plastered in stickers and cheap bits, or just generally be scruffy… and yet still asking decent money.

As my 17th birthday neared and I became disheartened, Dad presented the answer: a pre-reg R125 showing a handful of miles at a price he said 'we couldn't refuse'. It was way more than I wanted to spend, and obviously with it being my dad I thought he was joking. But it made sense: a three-year warranty, no MOT worries for the same period, and the knowledge it hadn't been previously abused by a peer. It made financial sense too: yes, the asking price made me wince, but two- or three-year-old R125s fetch big money – I'd lose less over a few years than on an older one. Insurance is expensive, but that's to do with age. The bike would only be a couple of hundred a year more than a pre-thrashed older example.

Obviously, it didn't take much to talk me into it. It was only after we'd committed that I realised it would be a current bike on a 2025 plate. Talk about excited…

I spend the month up to its arrival riding my 50cc bike to school and work, then getting home and watching videos of the R125 on YouTube and social media, imagining when I can have mine.

I wait… and wait… and then out the back of a van rolls MY new bike. It is even bigger than I thought, has the sort of tech, switches and display I'd expect on a big bike (I can connect my phone for navigation, and it has traction control and ABS, and loads of display options), and it sounds deeper and louder, too. I have no idea why people change the exhaust. It's hard to wrap round my head around the fact it's actually mine: it looks stunning.

The real deal

It's brilliant to ride, too. After waiting all day for the rain to stop on my birthday – and deciding I can't wait

> **‘They all seem to be modified with big-bore kits and stupid exhausts’**

So that’s where Mike’s leathers have gone...

any longer – I do what everyone does when they get their new bike; ride round to all their mates.

Yes, they’re as impressed as me. Having only previously ridden a sit-up moped and a couple of dirt bikes, the riding position feels very different and takes some getting used to. But it’s the overall feel of the Yamaha that has the biggest impact. Not just the increase in power (being able to stay with traffic makes such a difference) but the way it handles and deals with bumps. And the overall feel of quality. And the brakes! My cheap second-hand 50 did what we needed it to, but this is light years ahead. And I don’t make it look tiny.

After riding it for a week I’m quickly nearing 600 miles and have finished running the engine in, so it’s booked in for the first service.

I can’t wait for the rest of summer – I thought riding my 50 had brought me freedom, but this is a step on again. I absolutely love it. ***LA***

Insurance for young ’uns

It ain’t cheap. Jessica Lofts at Lexham Insurance has a few hints.

‘Fully comp cover isn’t always the way to go. Say you buy a £500 bike and take out cover with an excess totalling £500 – the policy wouldn’t pay out for anything further. In these instances, it may be worth looking at a lower level of cover. If you don’t commute, or don’t do many miles, some insurers may offer a lower premium.

‘Adding an older or more experienced rider may bring down the cost. But adding them as the main rider is considered fronting, and tantamount to fraud and misrepresentation. This could result in your policy being cancelled or claims being denied.

‘Adding or changing parts to boost performance or cosmetics could affect your premium, too. Some underwriters will not cover certain modifications, and some may make the bike uninsurable.’

» lexhaminsurance.co.uk, 01379 454397

[Skills]

Calmer, smoother, safer. . . quicker

Feeling lightly singed by the potential of our **BMW S1000R**, editor Armitage toddles along to Mallory Park for a confidence-righting masterclass from a pair of Mackenzies

Multiple British champion patiently escorts pottering journalist

All the gear, no idea. Or not much of one, at least. Our BMW S1000R long-term test bike is an exceptional device, but I've been trundling along feeling like I'm doing just that – trundling. It's not a speed thing – the Beemer supernaked has more firepower than a particularly tooled-up A-Team. It's more to do with confidence. I think I've contracted lean angle fear.

To remedy this, I'm at Mallory Park in Leicestershire for the BMW Performance Academy. Obviously, it's track-based, but I'm hoping a bit of guidance and tuition can do wonders for my confidence and let me better gel with the rabid S1000R.

It's not a regular trackday. Headed by former National Superstock champion Taylor Mackenzie, there's a host of big-name riders supplying instruction for a remarkably small group of riders – just 30 people. BMW supply the bikes, with the choice ranging from the latest F900R via the S1000R to the S1000RR, along with fuel, tyres, food and a nice certificate. Classroom sessions run by Taylor's dad Niall are alternated with one-to-one tuition on track, today with James Westmoreland, Danny Webb, Charlie Nesbitt and Dan Linfoot alongside Taylor. The goal is to make riders 'faster, safer and more accomplished'. I fancy some of that.

Firstly, a couple of sessions following Taylor with three of us nose to tail, with debriefs afterwards. These are steady, to show where Mallory goes and to get the correct lines etched into our minds. The classroom stuff focuses on body positioning, gear selection, controls and technique, with plenty of opportunity

'And did I tell you I won three out of four BSB races here in 1997?'

In slow, out bloomin' fast

'He knows my line into and out of the long, fast Gerard's is rubbish'

to ask silly questions. And the tuition comes by following the instructor for a load of laps.

Yes, following. This seems a bit odd, as all my dubious riding and poor technique will be happening behind them. But it works. Niall has wriggled into his leathers to guide me round, and I'm astounded at how much he notices about my appalling abilities from using his mirrors and occasionally glancing behind. He knows my line into and out of the long, fast Gerard's is rubbish, that I'm fluffing the hairpin, and even that I'm holding third gear around the downhill Devil's Elbow onto the start/finish straight.

And the advice is focused. 'Going into Gerard's it's tarmac, a few inches of white line then grass, and you're going into there at 100mph,' says Niall. 'It's not easy to judge. Go in later than you want to, so you close the throttle, and the bike comes back nicely to the inside. On the exit, get back to the inside and have the bike upright. You can open the throttle and drive out over the crest.

'At the hairpin you brake upright but still need to trail-brake in, and it's important to get back to the throttle. I stay tight and get a dead straight line to the Bus Stop chicane. In the last part of the hairpin the bike wants to fall onto its side, so get back to the throttle. For a quick lap you have to accelerate.'

And for Devil's Elbow? 'Get to fourth as quick as you like and get back to the throttle – you'll feel that you can accelerate in safety as you've got nice, soft power. It lets you open the throttle – it's less aggressive, the shift's done. There's plenty of torque to drive you out and the bike is more stable.'

We have a couple more sessions, and I try to follow the guidance as well as Niall's lines. It takes several laps to get my head around Gerard's. We're middle of the track mid-corner where my instinct says be tighter, but the line then squares off the exit – and I can tell it's working because of how much more of a tug the front brake needs at the end of the straight. The speed has come from track position, not throttle bravery or wild lean angle. But it's the hairpin that's the biggest eye-opener. My traditional sweepy lines run me wide on the exit, where Niall hugs the inside then rockets straight to the Bus Stop – he even stays hanging off the right-side of the bike, as his straight entry to the chicane means the left bit isn't really a left bit. He then brakes, drops the bike to his knee and skips out the other side.

Using his advice and lines makes the hairpin safer (less time leaning over), quicker (more acceleration) and less effort (less clambering around on the bike like an excited chimp). It's a similar story for the whole lap.

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*As of February 2024

**source: www.reviews.co.uk/company-reviews/store/mcn-compare

REVIEWS.io

By the end of the afternoon the difference in my speed is remarkable, yet seemingly for less effort – and crucially I have confidence when turning in and with the S1000R over on its side that I haven't felt for yonks. And Niall has one more bit of advice. My weakest bit is the entry to the Edwina's chicane, where I feel I just can't go through as quickly as my guide; it feels like he just edges away no matter what I do. But I'm wrong. The problem isn't my cornering, it's the bit before.

'I don't go into Edwina's fast,' says Mackenzie, despite my eyes telling me differently. 'It's about going in slow and then changing direction. I'm slower than I could be at the first apex – although I'm turning left and the bike's leaning left, I'm already getting over to the right, so it changes direction quickly. When I'm at the second apex, I'm back to the throttle and able to jump out the corner. Rush into there and you're never getting out the other side – I'm conscious of doing my braking upright and I'm braking later than you, and that's what's making the gap.'

As with the previous sessions, Niall builds our speed (somehow managing to pull me along without creating a gap) for our final jolly of the day, and having got the Gerard's exit nailed I can focus on where to brake for Edwina's. And the old boy was right – now the corner feels right, because the bit before it is right.

There's been a relaxed, easy-going, unrushed feel to the whole day, yet with genuine leaps and bounds in my riding. Speed has gone from steady away, to goodness-me-that's-quite-fast-enough without fraying nerves; more importantly my feel for the bike, understanding of what it and I are doing, and the all-important confidence have soared.

The Performance Academy has lots of returning customers so clearly works, although ain't cheap – the remaining dates for this year are 13 August and 10 September, and it costs £749. You'll probably want the £249 insurance excess waiver too, just in case.

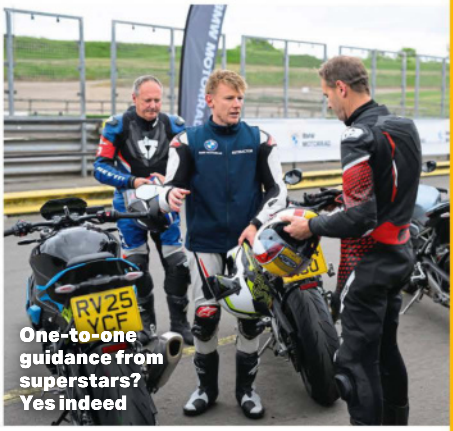
I've not experienced tuition like it, mind. ***MA***

» Visit www.bmwmotorrad-performanceacademy.com

Niall's already thinking 'exit'. Mike's already thinking 'lunch'

MALLORY PARK
Bus Stop
Shaws

Physical demos from a bloke who's ridden a lap or two



One-to-one guidance from superstars? Yes indeed

'Perfect if you like riding on track but don't like trackdays'

» 'Last year, BMW wanted to revamp their Performance Academy and asked if I would run it,' says chief instructor Taylor Mackenzie. 'I'd done a lot of instruction for the Ron Haslam School and Chris Walker School, and on trackdays – so I tried to amalgamate everything I've learned over the past 10 or 15 years.

'Last year was the first standalone events, rather than days that piggybacked a trackday, and it's made a huge difference. It's made it so much safer as an event – it's the perfect place for someone who's never been on track before, or who likes riding on track but doesn't necessarily like a trackday.

'This is much more controlled – there's no dodgy overtaking and there are so few people. The most we have on a day is about 30 riders. We could double that, but we want to keep it exclusive, low numbers, with people just here for learning.

'What I love about it is that everyone's guaranteed to have a good day. The bikes are mega, the track's perfect for learning on, you get one-to-one instruction… You can do a full day on larger tracks and pupils still don't know where they're going by the last session; you can learn the track here in the first session, then concentrate on your riding.

'We get lots of people new to track riding, but we also get customers who don't want to have to buy a track bike and maintain it, don't want to book a random track, don't want a day with loads of red flags. When you look at doing normal trackdays and getting a bike, tyres, fuel, van, tyre warmers – and fixing your bike after someone has crashed into you – this is probably no more expensive. And you have an instructor with you all day.

'I'm not your typical racer trying to sell something that's crap – it's such a good thing. I want people to know about it.'

Taylor. What a nice chap

[**Racing**]

Owen Jenner: not forgotten

Two months after Rapid Honda's rider Owen Jenner died in a multi-bike crash at Oulton Park, his team manager **Matt Bainbridge** reflects on a life well lived

Now I've had time for Owen's death to sink in, I'd like to share some thoughts about his life.

My first introduction to him was when he and our old rider Franco [Bourne] had a coming together, and the next time I saw Owen he was surfing the roof of a car being driven through the Brands Hatch living area. So perhaps you can understand why I had reservations about him riding for us.

But you only had to speak to him to understand how focused and determined he was – and why he was so popular with those who knew him. By his own admission he'd had a few wild party years, but aged 21, he'd gained focus.

And his confidence was infectious. When reigning champion Jack Kennedy confirmed he was staying in Supersport for 2025, Owen's reaction was 'wicked!'. He knew that if he wanted to be the best, he had to beat the best, and that meant beating Jack on a Honda. He knew he wasn't going to do it immediately, but he wasn't afraid to set out his goals. That confidence rubbed some people up the wrong way but they probably won't win anything. If you want to reach the sky you have to aim for the stars.

Tricky start

His time with Rapid Honda didn't start in the best way – he broke a finger flat tracking, then ended up in hospital after 1.5 laps of the first test in Spain after catching a kerb with his foot. But when he cut his cast off on the second day and wanted to ride, I knew he was a trier. When you have someone like that in your team, it makes everyone try harder.

I really got to know Owen during long lorry trips to Donington and Oulton and having him stay at my house beforehand. I genuinely believed he was special – not just as a rider and proven winner, but also as a person. He was a joy to work with – always on time, courteous, proactive with sponsors and grateful for our efforts. That's a rare combination in racing.

And he was great with Harley (see below), who he took under his wing and was always happy to offer time and advice. A lot of riders could learn a huge amount from how Owen conducted himself. He was a credit to his mum Emma and dad Mick.

Amazing funeral

The turnout at his funeral was testament to his popularity, with people travelling from Australia to pay their respects. Before we got to know him, my partner Claire and I wondered how he got so popular with the girls in the paddock, but soon learned: it was because he was popular with everyone.

Don't get me wrong, he had his faults (and a dubious internet search history). But his cheeky chappy charm was impossible to resist and his focus was undeniable: he achieved so much, and would have achieved so much more. I'm heartbroken that the journey was cut short but so proud to have been a small part of his story. Rest in Peace, Owen. ***MB***

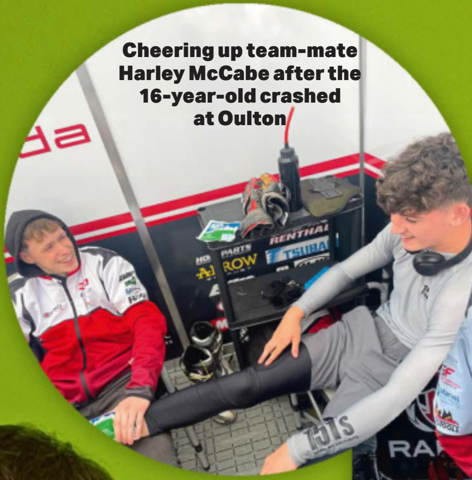
Harley steps up

» 'It's one of those weekends where the results don't show the pace the rider has got,' says Rapid's Dave Hewson, who was Owen's crew chief and is now helping the team's second rider, 16-year-old Harley McCabe, in the Sportbike class.

'After some mechanical problems at Knockhill, Harley qualified 30th, which we know isn't his level. In the race he got up to 18th which was good – it was a sensible ride through the pack. In the second race he started 20th and finished 16th, which was also a good performance because he didn't panic, he chipped away and stayed out of trouble. A lot of far more experienced riders were falling off due to the wet conditions.

'At the end he was running a pace that was good enough for top 10 but unfortunately he started too far back. It's given him a lot of confidence because he kept getting faster and faster. He likes Brands Hatch, so we're looking forward to it.'

Confidence-building weekend for Harley at Knockhill

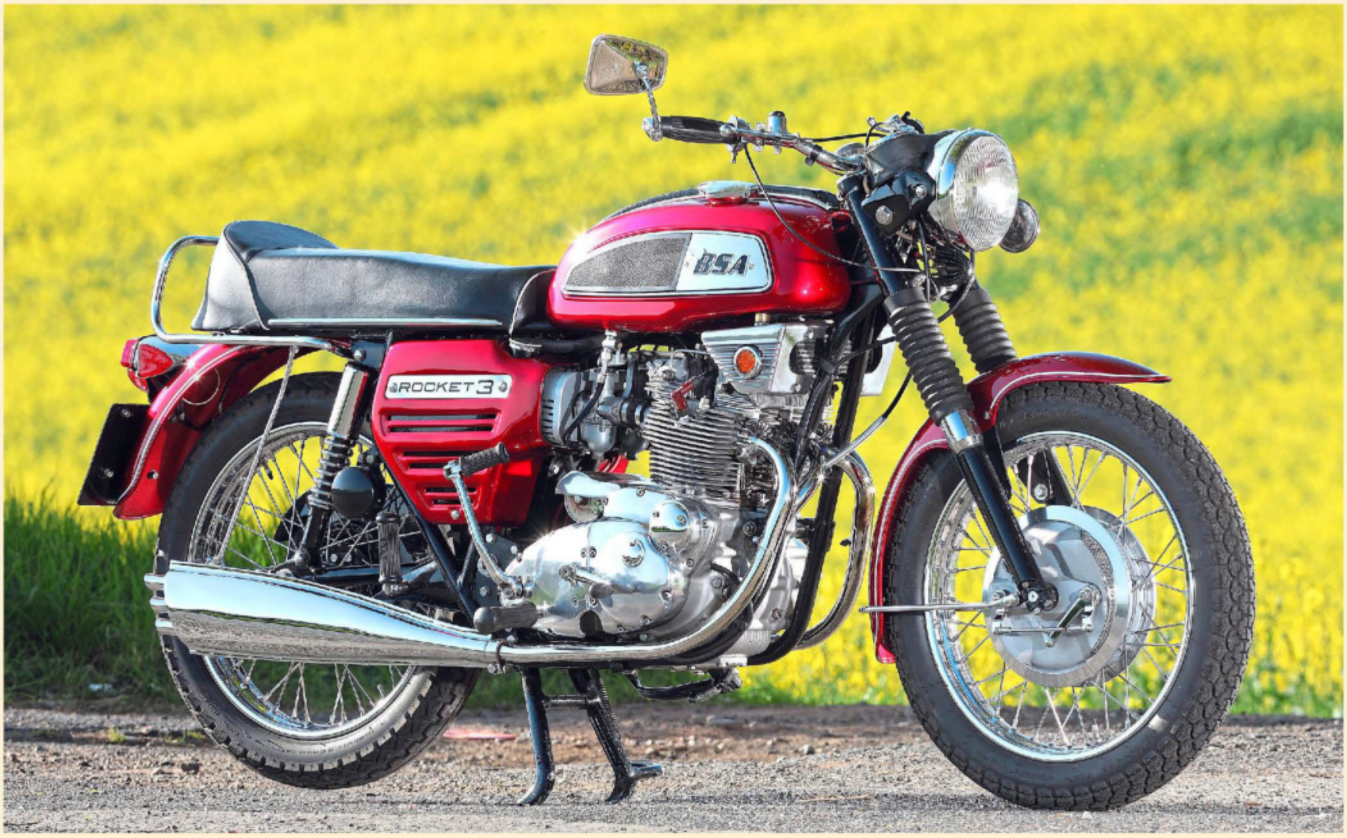


Cheering up team-mate Harley McCabe after the 16-year-old crashed at Oulton

Making a young supporter's day. That's team manager Matt on the right

‘A lot of riders could learn a huge amount from how Owen conducted himself’

A broken finger flat-tracking and still smiling (though maybe that was down to gulping the gas and air...)



PIC: JOHN NOBLE

[Ahead of its time]

1968 BSA Rocket 3

Three pots in a row is nowt much to stiffen your trousers these days, but when BSA (and Triumph) first cracked on it was a sizeable stride onwards

Enjoy the ample power, smooth running and enchanting soundtrack of your contemporary Triumph triple or Yamaha MT-09? You have Messrs Doug Hele and Bert Hopwood of the BSA-Triumph group to thank.

As early as 1963 the pair had sketched out a three-cylinder engine that could be built relatively cheaply by using componentry from the Triumph 5TA 500cc twin. By fabricating a new middle crankcase section, casting a new cylinder and head, and forging a crankshaft, a 740cc triple was on the cards.

Naturally enough for the time, no one wielding executive power paid a blind bit of notice to this invention and the plans were stuffed into a drawer and forgotten about. Until it dawned on management that perhaps they needed something other than superannuated twins to keep a toehold on the big bike market. The triple could have been ready as early as 1965 had anyone been alive to the possibility, but it was 1968 that the BSA Rocket 3 (engine canted forward 20°) and the Triumph Trident (upright lump) broke cover.

Instead of trusting Triumph's design team to make the new triple pleasing to the eye in the manner of previous Trumpets, Ogle Design – responsible for the 1968 Raleigh Chopper bicycle – were employed to create a new look. The squared-off tank and triple-outlet 'Raygun' silencers did not go down well. Honda then released the four-cylinder CB750 in 1969 and the Brit triple bombed in the showrooms until it was redesigned along more traditional Triumph lines for 1971.

But if the cycle parts left something to be desired, the power unit was a peach. Race versions, housed in frames constructed by Rob North in Coventry, put out 84bhp at 8250rpm and fairly swept the board in competition throughout the early 1970s. Hele and Hopwood urged their bosses to put a Rob North-framed machine into production. As you might imagine, the top brass failed to grasp the sales potential of a super-hot, standout handsome British proddie racer.

The very first three-cylinder motorcycle engine was the 1932 500cc Moto Guzzi Tre Cilindri produced for one year only. The Hele/Hopwood triple was the daddy of all the four-stroke three-pot lumps that succeeded it: the 1973 Laverda 3C, 1976 Yamaha XS750, 1985 BMW K75, Benellis, Hinckley Triumphs, MVs, and Yamaha MT-09s. Anyone who has ridden a triple of any kidney appreciates the virtues of the layout. With the possible exception of early Laverdas (Jotas especially) with the fairly rough 180° crank phasing, anything with 120° throws enjoys perfect primary balance, and produces good torque and decent power.

There is also the significant matter of the siren wail of a triple on the cam. Nothing comes close. A good triple is always of its time. But the BSA/Triumph was ahead. ***Mark Graham***

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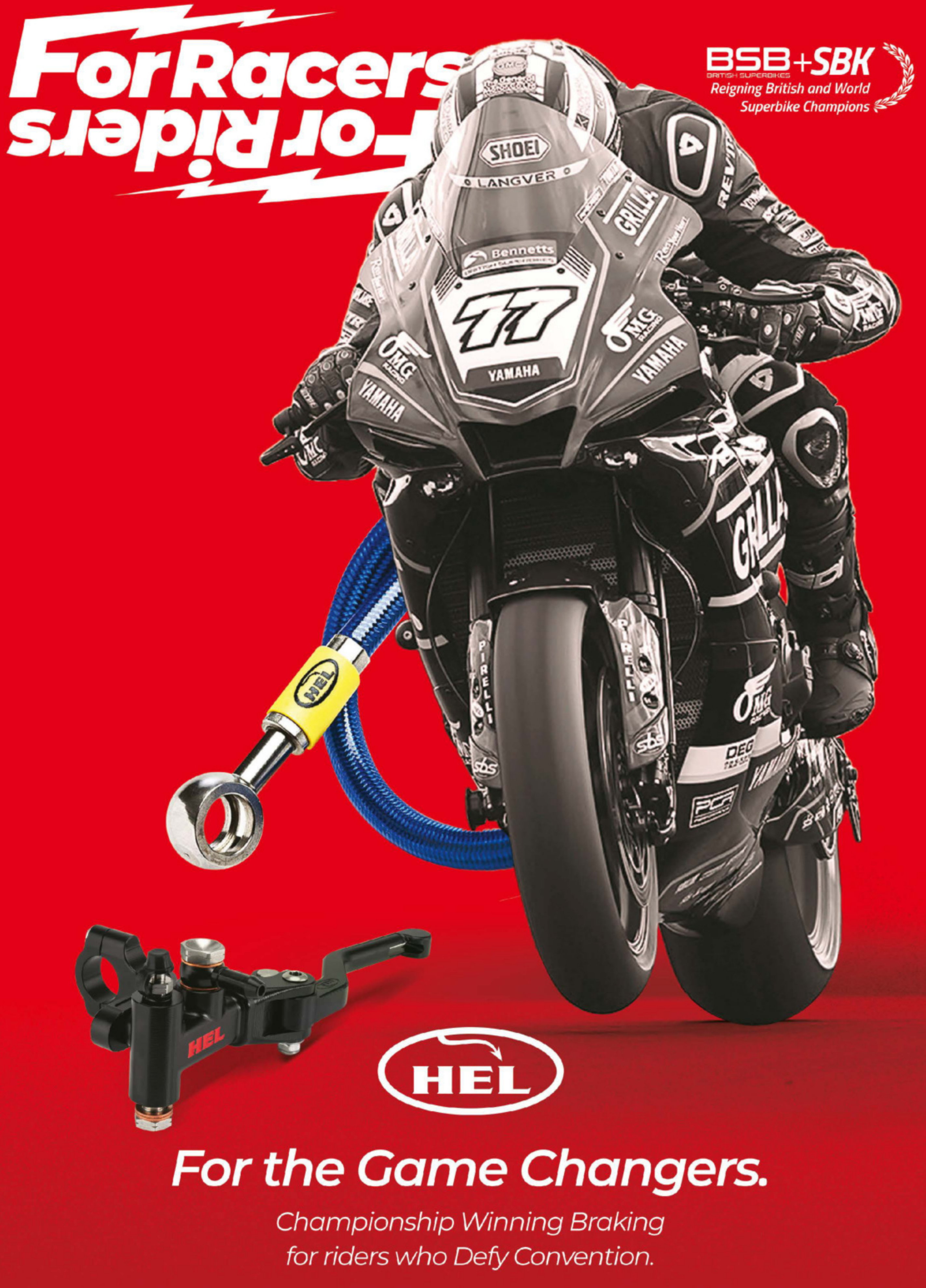
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